SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

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SERMON I.

ROM. vi. 21.

What Fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the End of those things is Death.

THE first Resolution, which every one should take in the Conduct of Life, is to deliberate seriously, as soon as he becomes capable of it, by what Rule his future Behaviour shall be formed. And one principal Cause of the Follies, which Men commit, and the Miseries into which they fall, is their strange Neglect of this obvious Duty: a Duty impossible to be controverted; for it is only inquiring what will be most for our Interest.

And yet a very great Part of Mankind never once think of any certain Rule at all for their Conduct; but go on at random, indulging the present Inclination, which Way soever it leads

and how often soever it may vary: and thus fill up a Life of thoughtless Inconsistency, aiming at no one End beyond pleasing themselves any how for the time, let what will follow. But surely a very little Reflection might shew, that what pleases us now, may ruin us ere long, perhaps very soon: that different Courses of Life have very different Consequences, highly deserving our Attention: and in particular, that those of a virtuous and a vicious Life differ so extremely, that we ought not to continue an Hour undetermined, longer than we must, which we shall pursue. What the Prophet *Elijah* said to the *Israelites* belongs equally to all of this unsettled Character: *How long halt ye between two Opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow Him*[a]. Why this perpetual Wavering and Fluctuation, about the first thing, that you ought to fix; the one Point, on which all depends! If a profane and immoral Conduct will produce and secure Happiness to you, follow Profaneness and Immorality, *yield your Members as Instruments of Unrighteousness unto Sin*[b]. But if Religion and Virtue be the Means of true and lasting Self-enjoyment, let Religion and Virtue be your

[a] 1 Kings xviii. 21. [b] Rom. vi. 13.

Care,

Care, and *yield yourselves Servants of Righteousness unto God*[c]. *Chuse ye therefore this Day, whom ye will serve*[d].

And there are indeed Multitudes, that would give sufficient Proofs of having made a Choice, and a very ill one, if running headlong into Wickedness merited the Name of chusing it. But rational Choice presupposes due Consideration: whereas these poor Wretches have suffered themselves to be led on blindfold, by Example and Custom, unexamined Appearances and ungoverned Inclinations, with no more Notion of inquiring, whether they are in the right Road, than if there were no other at all. Or if ever they have deliberated, they have done it unfairly or superficially; or upon some one Point of their Behaviour, not the whole; and perhaps, only which of two interfering Desires, both of them wrong, they should gratify. But surely the first Division of human Conduct is into religious and irreligious. Which of these two we ought to prefer, is the Question that we are to begin with: and it will be time enough to consider, in what Way we shall be bad, after we have examined, whether it is not our Wisdom to be good.

c Rom. vi. 13, 19. d Josh. xxiv. 15.

In this moſt important Inquiry an imperfect View of things may eaſily deceive us, and doth in Fact deceive the Generality of Mankind. We muſt therefore be very careful to lay before ourſelves the whole of what is to be expected, hoped or feared. But indeed both our own Paſſions and Appetites, and the Opinions and Practices of the World, will be ſure to remind us abundantly of what makes in Favour of prohibited Indulgences. And conſequently, in order to keep our Judgment upright, we muſt be diligent in repreſenting to ourſelves what makes againſt them. And we cannot poſſibly do it in a better Method, than that of the Apoſtle, addreſſing himſelf to the *Roman* Converts: *What Fruit had ye then in thoſe things, whereof ye are now aſhamed? for the End of thoſe things is Death.*

In theſe Words is propoſed to our ſerious Thoughts,

I. The preſent Unprofitableneſs of Sin.

II. The Shamefulneſs of it.

III. The Puniſhment, which awaits it.

I ſhall be able in this Diſcourſe to conſider only the firſt Point, The Unprofitableneſs of Sin, even at preſent. And for this he appeals to the Hearts and Conſciences of thoſe, with whom

whom he argues: *What Fruit had ye then in those things?* well knowing they muſt own, that upon Trial they had found none: a Confeſſion, which very few have ever failed to make, when after a Life, ſpent in Wickedneſs, they came to reflect coolly, what real Advantage they had gained by it on the Upſhot. The Language of thoſe, who will be prevailed on to balance that great Account, is almoſt univerſally the ſame, which *Elihu* in *Job* aſcribes to the Penitent, *I have ſinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not*[e]. Some may imagine this to ariſe from a Diſpoſition, which we have, to be diſcontented; and to think, after a while, any other Way better, than that which we have choſen. But how comes it to paſs then, that no pious and virtuous Man was ever known, calmly and deliberately, to make the ſame Declaration concerning his manner of Life? Nothing hath been more common in all Ages, than for the Wicked to acknowledge their Miſtakes and their Miſery, and exhort others to take Warning by them. But the Good, as ſoon as ever they had Time to become habitually ſuch, have always pronounced themſelves eaſy and happy; and

[e] Job xxxiii. 27.

thought it the greateſt Kindneſs, that they could do to thoſe, whom they loved the moſt tenderly, to beg they would tread in their Steps. Now, in other Caſes, we look on the agreeing Teſtimony of thoſe, who have experienced what they affirm, as being deciſive. Why then ſhould we diſtruſt them in this alone; and obſtinately inſiſt upon trying what they forewarn us aloud will be fatal? Indeed, have not ſome of us tried much too far already? And, for God's ſake, let us aſk ourſelves, what Fruit we have had from it, and what we are likely to have, in caſe we proceed further.

But if we will reckon the Experience of others incompetent, and our own imperfect, let us conſider the natural Tendency of Sin. Should we be unable to diſcover from thence, why it ſhould do us Harm, we may doubt whether it doth the Harm, that we are told, or will go on to do the Harm that we have hitherto felt from it: but if we ſee, that in its Nature it muſt be unprofitable and hurtful, as well as learn from the Experience of others and our own that it is ſo, then ſurely nothing will be wanting to convince us.

Now we all know, however apt we are to forget it, that Reaſon is the principal Part of

our Frame: thence therefore if we are made with any Wiſdom, we muſt expect the principal Part of our Happineſs: and yet every Sort of Wickedneſs is abſolutely contradictory to Reaſon. Undutifulneſs to an almighty Superior, and Ingratitude to a gracious Benefactor, ſuch as God is; Unkindneſs to our Relations and Friends, Hard-heartedneſs to Perſons in Diſtreſs, Injuſtice or Inplacability to any one, or Uſeleſſneſs to thoſe, who are uſeful to us: degrading ourſelves below the Rank of our Nature, and living only or chiefly to brutal Appetites, though we are men; or to trifling Pleaſures, though we have Capacities for much worthier Employments: all theſe things are evidently unreaſonable and unfit, as any thing can be. And what Advantage or what Quiet can we hope in diſobeying that Principle, which was plainly deſigned to rule us?

Beſides, our Affections were doubtleſs originally intended to accord with Reaſon: and, though much diſordered by the Fall of our firſt Parents, yet in a conſiderable Meaſure they do ſo ſtill. Now can we queſtion, but that Diſorder is the Cauſe of Miſery to us here? And if ſo, the greater we make it by Acts of Sin, the greater our Miſery will be; and the more

we rectify it by Acts of Piety and Virtue, the nearer we shall return to our natural State, in which alone every thing flourishes and doth well. Right Reason and right Affection were the primitive Rules, that God gave Man to live by: and how can we fancy that we shall ever find our Account in putting a Force upon them, and wresting ourselves from under their Government?

But a farther and very material Consideration is, that all Kinds of Wickedness manifestly tend to destroy the good Order, Prosperity and Peace, of Kingdoms, of Communities, of Families: and that indeed the Injuries which Men do to one another by transgressing the Laws of God, make up the heaviest and bitterest Part of the Sufferings of Life. Now what is contrary to the Interest of all in general, must be in some Degree prejudicial to that of every one in particular: and each Person who is guilty of it, *teaches* others *an evil Lesson against himself*[f]. The Vicious, even those who value themselves the most on their good Nature, are one Way or another, perhaps many Ways, perpetually doing Mischief. They are indeed Enemies, as far as their Influence reaches, to

[f] Ecclus ix. 1.

the whole Society of Mankind. It is the general Intereſt of the World to oppoſe and diſcourage them. It is the particular Buſineſs of Government to reſtrain and puniſh them. All that ſuffer conſiderably by them, will be ſure to abominate them: and moſt others will ſcorn and deſpiſe them. Now it is a dreadful Evil to loſe a Bleſſing ſo juſtly dear to Men, as that of a good Name and Reputation. To be abhorred, or even ſuſpected and diſtruſted, by thoſe amongſt whom we live, is hardly ſupportable: to be merely diſliked and diſapproved, is very mortifying. Yet one or other of theſe they muſt expect: not only from the religious and worthy, whoſe Eſteem ought to be and ever will be chiefly deſired, but alſo from their Fellow Sinners; who conſtantly condemn the Sins, which they do not practiſe, and often thoſe which they do. Sometimes indeed ſome of them may join in applauding their common Follies: but that makes them never the leſs Follies. Sometimes, for private Ends, Perſons may flatter for a while ſuch as they inwardly hold in Deriſion or Deteſtation. But this Kind of Court never doth Good to thoſe who receive it: nor is it able to hinder but that on the whole miſchievous Vices will produce Hatred, and

impru-

imprudent ones Contempt. And what Fruit can Men reap from ſuch things?

But hitherto you have heard Proofs only of the common ill Effects of all Sins: let us now conſider the ſeveral Sorts, and the Fruits of each of them, ſeparately.

Some of our bad Inclinations are neceſſarily, in the very feeling of them, uneaſy and painful: as Envy, Hatred and Anger. Others are ſo at leaſt in their immediate Conſequences: diſquieting our Minds with weariſome and endleſs Purſuits, of what we ſhall either not obtain, or not keep, or be little or nothing the better for, if we do. Such is the exorbitant Thirſt of Power and Rank and Wealth: always reſtleſs and diſſatisfied, always full of Diſcontents and Diſappointments. Again, ſome of them prompt us to overvalue ourſelves, often to our great Damage; and at the ſame Time provoke others to undervalue us: as do Pride and Vanity. Some, if they are accompanied with no Pain, yet can make no Pretence to giving any Pleaſure: as Profaneneſs. And the ſeeming Pleaſure of ſome others is in Reality ſcarce more than getting rid of a Torment, which a good Mind would never have experienced. Such, and no better, is the Joy of Revenge,

venge. Nay, where criminal Gratifications are the moſt agreeable, as in ſenſual Indulgences; beſides that they are uſually very fleeting and ſhort-lived, perhaps an equal, perhaps a ſuperior Degree of them upon the whole, might by the means of Prudence have been obtained conſiſtently with Virtue: which doth not forbid the regular and ſeaſonable and temperate Satisfaction of any Deſire, but only reſtrains us within due and ſafe Bounds: whereas the Vicious, affecting immoderate and prohibited Liberties, are indeed the unhappieſt Slaves to their own Luſts and Fancies; eſpecially when by a Habit of yielding to them, they have taught them to claim, with abſolute Authority, the moſt pernicious Compliances. And in this Situation, how much inward Anguiſh muſt there often lie hid under the gayeſt Shews of Mirth and Amuſement; whether the Soul be oppreſſed by the ſettled Tyranny of a ſingle Paſſion, or torn in Pieces by the Rage of oppoſite ones, contending for Maſtery! [g] Then, what deſtructive Effects the Sins of this Kind have on the Healths and Fortunes of their

[g] Sic diſtrahuntur in contrarias partes impotentium cupiditates: cum huic obſecutus ſis, illi eſt repugnandum. Cic. Tuſc. Diſp. l. 5. §. 20. Intus etiam in animis incluſæ cupiditates inter ſe diſſident atque diſcordant: ex quo vitam amariſſimam neceſſe eſt effici. Cic. de Fin. l. 1. §. 13. Comp. §. 18.

Votaries,

Votaries, disqualifying them, often in the Beginning of Life, for the Enjoyment of every thing in which they placed the Happiness of it, and exposing them to great Distresses and Sufferings throughout the Remainder, is much too well known to need enlarging on, though much less considered, than its Importance requires.

But too many imagine, that, whatever others do, They shall sin with Discretion; gratify their Inclinations and carry on their Designs, of whatever sort they be, with so much Art, as to avoid all manner of bad Consequences. But why do they imagine so? It is hard enough to govern our Passions before they have been accustomed to Indulgence. But first to indulge them, and then think to stop where we please, is a Scheme that always hath deceived, and always will deceive, those who are weak enough to rely upon it. Virtuous Behaviour hath plain and firm Ground to stand upon: but if once we quit our sure Footing there, the Declivity is endless, the Tendency downwards will increase every Moment, and how far we may be carried, God only knows. They who have gone the most fatal Lengths in Sin, resolved at first, as much as you can do, to proceed cautiously: never once questioning but they could keep their Resolution, till it was too late. And it

may

may very ſoon be too late with any of us. For not only the Habit of every Vice leads Men farther and farther in it, but the moſt different Vices are ſtrangely connected with each other: and he who intended to allow himſelf in but one ſeemingly harmleſs Tranſgreſſion, is drawn by it gradually, or hurried unawares, into Numbers of worſe, that end in his Ruin; the Grace of God being juſtly withdrawn from ſuch preſumptuous Offenders.

But it will be objected, that however unprofitable ſome Sins may be, yet others are peculiarly calculated for Profit; as Covetouſneſs, with its Retainers, Fraud and Extortion: which the *Wiſe in their Generation* [h] would never practiſe, unleſs they found the Advantage of them, as they viſibly do. Now if by Advantage be meant, what ſhould be meant, real Happineſs, they viſibly do not. Covetouſneſs is peculiarly a miſerable Paſſion: and diſtinguiſhed by that very Name of *miſerable* in common Speech. The Temper itſelf is full of Fears and Cares, Alarms and Suſpicions. Then, in order to gratify it, every benevolent, if not every honeſt, Diſpoſition of our Hearts muſt be contradicted; and when it riſes to a certain Height, every innocent Enjoyment of Life, that carries the

[h] Luke xvi. 8.

least Expence with it, must either be renounced, or grudged while it is tolerated. But without running to such Extremes, to all avaritious Minds the smallest Losses will be heavy Misfortunes; and the greatest Gains will want something of being so great as they should have been. They must undergo the Pain of envying every one that is in Circumstances above them: they must expect at the same Time the ill Will of every one beneath them: and after all, their unnatural Cravings, far from being appeased, will increase much faster, than their Possessions; and the more eagerly they endeavour to quench their Thirst, the more fiercely it will return upon them. Or let us suppose, if you will, the Desire of Gain to be indulged, not with the absurd View of hoarding to no Purpose and no End; but for the Delight of satisfying more natural Inclinations by the Means of great Wealth: yet, if these be moderate and reasonable, they may be very competently satisfied without it; and, if they be excessive, you have seen already that they are hurtful, and therefore ought not to have Provision made for them.

If then Covetousness of both Sorts be unwise; Fraud and Extortion, which only serve as Instruments of Covetousness, cannot be be-

neficial. But on the contrary, they have peculiar Disadvantages belonging to them. There are indeed Instances, too frequently, of Riches acquired by indirect Methods: but still Dishonesty hath ruined many more than it hath raised: and the Ruin of such is never pitied, and seldom retrieved. Fair Dealing is the plain Path, which God hath marked out for Mankind to go in: and they who think to be too cunning for their Maker, are few of them able to depart from it without injuring themselves even now, as much or more than they do others. One half of the Contrivance and Circumspection, that Men are obliged to in a knavish Way, would have enabled them to thrive very well in an honest one, without the Hatred and Curse of all around them, without the perpetual Dread of being detected, and the Loss they must suffer, whenever that happens, (which seldom fails,) both by others declining to have any further Concern with them, and perhaps by the Penalties which the Law will inflict on them. Or let them escape these Dangers ever so well; yet how often doth it fall out, that either what they have acquired wickedly, they squander foolishly, it may be wickedly too, and so nothing remains with them but the Guilt of both; or, at least, Posterity, for whose sake chiefly

chiefly they have taken these unrighteous Pains, dissipate in a few Years what they have been accumulating in many; and very possibly give them the Torment, which they have well deserved, of shewing them beforehand, that they will dissipate it! And thus is the Scripture Warning verified: *An Inheritance may be gotten hastily at the Beginning; but the End thereof shall not be blessed*[i].

You see then how many and great the present and worldly Inconveniencies of Wickedness are: and I have dwelt on them so largely because present and worldly things are apt to affect us so much. Yet still it must be acknowledged, that all of them do not follow constantly, and that sometimes considerable Advantages in Appearance may be gained by transgressing our Duty. But perhaps even then as considerable ones of the same Kind may be lost by it: for Men cannot have the Benefit of two opposite Characters and Behaviours at the same Time. Or, if every thing should happen to their Wish, the Probability notwithstanding lay greatly on the other Side: the contrary was to have been expected: and therefore no wise Person would ever run the Hazard though now and then some one may chance to find his Account in it.

[i] Prov. xx. 21.

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But indeed we are as yet only in the firſt Article of the Account; and have by no means completed that. Not only the poſitive outward Evils, that Wickedneſs brings upon us, but the inward Satisfactions and Comforts of which it deprives us, muſt be taken in. Sincerity of good Will, Openneſs of Confidence, Faithfulneſs of Friendſhip, Tenderneſs of Affection, Conſciouſneſs of merited Eſteem, are the ſweeteſt Ingredients in human Life. Now all theſe, with all the Complacency and Joy of Heart that flows from them, the Wicked, by their ambitious, their covetous, their ſenſual Purſuits, by their Reſentments, their Falſhoods, their Neglects, their Provocations, exclude themſelves from enjoying: wear out from their Hearts by Degrees the moſt delightful Senſibilities of which human Nature is capable; and leave nothing there, but the wretched Feelings of hating or diſregarding others, and being hated or diſregarded by them. Then, in the various Afflictions and Croſſes of Life, in decaying Health, ſinking Spirits, and declining Age, a good Man hath many Supports, from the Innocence and Integrity of his paſt Life, from the Love and Gratitude of his Friends, from the firm Be-

lief of a wiſe and kind Providence, continually watching over him. But none of theſe Conſolations belong to a wicked Man, when he is in the ſame Condition: the things in which he placed his whole Happineſs have failed him and are gone; the Companions of his Proſperity deſert him, the World rejoices over him, Heaven frowns upon him, and his own Heart condemns him.

But this would lead me to the ſecond Head, the Shame attending Sin. After that, there remains a third, of the future Puniſhment awaiting it. Both theſe, God willing, ſhall be diſtinctly ſet before you: and then you will ſee in the fulleſt Light, whatever may ſeem wanting to the Evidence of it now, that *the Knowledge of Wickedneſs is not Wiſdom; neither at any Time the Counſel of Sinners, Prudence*[k].

God grant we may all be convinced of this while it will do us Good! To Him, with his Son and bleſſed Spirit, be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever. Amen.

[k] Ecclus. xix. 22.

SERMON II.

ROM. vi. 21.

What Fruit had ye then in thoſe things, whereof ye are now aſhamed? For the End of thoſe things is Death.

IN diſcourſing on theſe Words, I have propoſed to lay before you,

I. The preſent Diſadvantages of a wicked Life.

II. The Shamefulneſs of it.

III. The Puniſhment, which awaits it hereafter.

The firſt of theſe Heads I have finiſhed: and ſhewn, from the Teſtimony of the Wicked themſelves, from the Inconſiſtence of all Sin with the Principles of our Reaſon, from its Repugnancy to the original Dictates of our Affections, from its pernicious Influence on every Branch of human Society, that it muſt in gene-

ral produce unſpeakable Harm to us. Then I proceeded to prove, in relation to ſeveral Sins more particularly, that ſome of them are in their very Nature painful; and that the Pleaſures, which others promiſe, are either falſe and imaginary, or inconſiderable and ſhort-lived, or, to all the Purpoſes of real Happineſs, equally attainable, for the moſt Part, by virtuous Means: but that the Evils, which they bring on, are various and great, and often ſpeedy, and ſeldom avoided by the utmoſt Care: that even thoſe Sins which may ſeem peculiarly calculated for Profit and Advantage, are in truth as unprofitable and hurtful as the reſt: and that laſtly, beſides leading Men into the moſt grievous Inconveniences and Sufferings, Wickedneſs deprives them of the moſt valuable even of their worldly Enjoyments, Comforts, and Supports.

Were we therefore only to conſider, how unhappily it affects all the common and acknowledged Ingredients of our preſent well-being, a Courſe of Sin, on ſtating the Account merely thus, would be found, though perhaps not without Exceptions, yet with but few Exceptions, and ſuch as no one could rationally expect in his own Favour, a Courſe of Folly: as accordingly we ſee it conſtantly repreſented,

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even with reſpect to this World, not only by the ſacred Writers, but the greateſt and ableſt of Heathens themſelves; both ſuch as had ſome Belief of a future State, and ſuch as had none.

But for our fuller Satisfaction in a Point of this Moment, let us proceed farther to conſider,

II. The Shamefulneſs of it.

Now Shame is of two Sorts: ariſing from a Conſciouſneſs of having acted, either fooliſhly againſt our Intereſt, or wickedly againſt our Duty. I begin with the firſt.

An immoral Life being ſo full of Imprudence and Suffering as you have ſeen it is, many and ſevere Reflections on their own miſtaken Choice, muſt unavoidably torture the Minds of the vicious, from Time to Time, be they ever ſo induſtrious to baniſh them. The Abſurdity of the Things, which they ſay and do in the Madneſs of their Debauches; the Contemptibleneſs of their Condition, while they languiſh under the Effects of them; the miſerable Wages, which they receive for their hard Servitude to low Appetites; the Meanneſs of going on with what they have a thouſand Times reſolved to leave off; the wretched Shifts, that they muſt uſe to ſupport the Expences of their Irregularities; the Embarraſſments into which the moſt circum-

ſpect of them are continually running by unfair Practices; the grievous Diſappointments, which the wiſeſt of them experience, from what promiſed, as they imagined, the trueſt and higheſt Satisfaction; the extraordinary Pains which they have taken, to be never the happier, and are taking ſtill, only to be farther from their End than ever: theſe are Conſiderations, that will find a Seaſon to make their Way both into the gayeſt and the buſieſt Minds, and often embitter the Reliſh of their Pleaſures and their Proſperity, even while they are at the Height.

But when any remarkable Check hath been given to the Sinner in his Courſe; when the Iniquities of the fraudulent have expoſed him to Diſgrace and Loſs, or the Extravagances of the Spendthrift reduced him to Indigence, when the Strength and Spirits of the diſſolute are worn out, or advancing Years have brought on Satiety and Diſguſt: then, with full Leiſure for thinking of their Doings, and perhaps Inability for thinking of any thing elſe, to ſee that they have ſcorned the Dictates of Reaſon and the Counſels of the diſcreet and good, only to become miſerable; what Confuſion muſt they feel from it: they, who applauded ſo highly the Wiſdom of their own Way of Life, as the only

one worth living for, and ridiculed with ſuch unſpeakable Contempt the ſilly Scruples of the poor virtuous Man, whoſe Conduct they now find ſo vaſtly preferable to their own!

But further: this inward Self-diſpleaſure and Diſlike will, in ſuch Caſes, be greatly aggravated by the Cenſure and Upbraiding of the World, redoubled upon them when they can bear it leaſt. Sinners in Diſtreſs are uſually deſpiſed and condemned by their very Tempters, and Partners in Sin. All, whom they have injured, will claim a Right to inſult them. Thoſe, to whom they apply for Aſſiſtance or Comfort, will have a ſpecious Plea for diſregarding and rejecting them. The Generality will be eager to ſhew the Superiority, ſome of their Goodneſs, and ſome of their Prudence, by reproaching them bitterly for their want of both. Even the beſt and beſt-natured Perſons, while they mourn over them, muſt remind them how unwiſe they have been; and on proper Occaſions mention them as Warning to others. *Lo, this is the Man, that made not God his Strength, but ſtrengthened himſelf in his Wickedneſs*[a]. Now think, I beg you, what muſt their Feelings, amidſt all this, be!

[a] Pſal. lii. 7.

But, besides the Shame of Folly, they have a much worse Kind to undergo, that of Guilt, from the Consciousness, that their Behaviour hath been wrong and unworthy and of ill Desert. For with what Indifference soever many may affect to speak of this, all have at Times, a Sense of it extremely acute. Let any one ask his Heart, what it thinks, when seriously disposed, of Ingratitude for the Being, which God hath bestowed on us, and the Blessings, present and future, which he hath provided for us: of wilful and contemptuous Disobedience to Laws, so reasonable and beneficial, as he hath enjoined us; of scornfully slighting such Offers of Pardon and Acceptance, as our blessed Redeemer hath purchased for us by his Death, and made us in his Gospel; of neglecting the Means appointed for our spiritual Improvement, quenching the inward Suggestions of our heavenly Monitor, and *doing Despite unto the Spirit of Grace*[b]. Let any one reflect what his deliberate Sentiments are of Falshood and Treachery, of Oppression and Violence, of Cruelty and Implacability, of hard Heartedness and Insensibility; what Impressions it naturally makes on him to see Innocence betrayed to Ruin under Pretence of tender Affec-

[b] Heb. x. 20.

tion,

tion, the Peace and Honour of Families violated, or the due Order of Society deſtroyed, to gratify a lewd Appetite; to ſee a rational Creature degrade himſelf below a Beaſt by Intemperance, and abandon thoſe to Diſtreſs for whom he is bound by the ſtrongeſt Ties to make Proviſion. How do theſe things look in others? How would they look to you, if you were the Sufferer by them? Only remember therefore, that they are juſt the ſame, when you are the Doer of them; and then ſay, if Wickedneſs of every Kind doth not abound in Guilt and merit ſevere Puniſhment.

Indeed hath not every Sinner eſpecially at his firſt Entrance into Sin, had powerful Convictions of this Truth: found that there were Perſons, whom he could not ſee without Confuſion and Diſmay; Actions, which he could not think of, without hating himſelf? And what can make any one Amends for being in ſuch Circumſtances? He may hope indeed, that in time he ſhall get rid of theſe troubleſome Senſations; and may perſuade himſelf, that afterwards he ſhall be in as good a Condition, as if there were no Ground for them. But ſurely moſt abandoned muſt they be, who can delight in ſuch an Imagination: who having once known what Shame is, can be content

tent to live on in a Courſe of ſhameful Actions, in Hopes of loſing by Degrees the Perception of which are ſo, and which otherwiſe. What ſhould we think of a Perſon, who after diſcerning clearly the Deſpicableneſs of Folly, ſhould conſent to be changed into an Idiot, merely that he might play the Fool without Reſtraint from within; and ſhould fancy it to be Comfort enough, that then he ſhould not know the Difference? Yet this Man would be chiefly an Object of Pity: but the others, of utter Deteſtation. And even this ignominious Hope of theirs will certainly deceive them. For the Faculty of moral Reflection, Conſcience, is planted in us by our Maker for this very Purpoſe, that we may approve or condemn ourſelves, according as we act well or ill; and if our Underſtandings be at all cultivated by Education, it uſually gains Vigour enough to anſwer the Purpoſe, and cannot eaſily be rooted out. Whether we will be the better for its Admonitions, is in our own Power; elſe we ſhould not be free Agents: but feel them we muſt. And the many contrivances which the vicious uſe to lay the Senſe of their Vileneſs aſleep, and the deſperate Reſolutions which they frequently take when they cannot do it, are abundant

abundant Proofs, how ſharp the Pain of guilty Reflection may become.

Some indeed profligately boaſt of having got over it: and a few perhaps may; though not near ſo many, as will at times pretend they have. But what long and tormenting Struggles muſt they probably have experienced firſt: and in how deplorable a State muſt the benumbing and ſtupefying of ſo important a Principle of their Nature have left them! The Loſs of bodily Feeling and Motion is but a faint Image of it. And after all no one can be ſecure, that ſomething may not ſtill awaken this dormant Power, when he leaſt expects it. Some great and mortifying Diſappointment, ſome remarkable Stroke of God's Providence, ſome alarming Paſſage in his Word, ſome affecting Diſcourſe from the Pulpit, ſome experimental Confeſſion of a Fellow Sinner, nay merely ſome inſtantaneous Turn in his Mind, for which it is impoſſible to account, may preſent on a ſudden a moſt tremendous View of himſelf to his own Eyes: or ſome other Perſon may be induced or provoked to lay his Crimes in order before his Face, perhaps before the World. And then, whatever Aſcendant he may have gained over his Conſcience before, impoſing on it with ſpecious Colours, or calling off its Attention from his

paſt

paſt Behaviour, yet then he will be forced to behold things as they are; and appear not only wretched and guilty to himſelf, but an Object of Abhorrence to others. Now general bad Opinion is hard enough to be born, even when the Mind is ſupported by Innocence: but when Infamy is accompanied with the Conviction of deſerving it, almoſt intolerable. For the Feeling is not only dreadful in itſelf, but fills the Soul with endleſs Jealouſies and Suſpicions, diſtracting Horrors and Fears, even of Dangers the leaſt probable. *Wickedneſs, condemned by her own Witneſs, is very timorous; and being preſſed with Conſcience, always forecaſteth grievous Things*[c]. *The Wicked are like the troubled Sea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe Waters caſt up Mire and Dirt: there is no Peace, ſaith my God, to the Wicked*[d]. Whoſe Notice ſoever they eſcape, the very worſt the baſeſt of their Deeds lie conſtantly open to his View: and what *Shame of Face*[e] and Dread of Heart muſt that awful Recollection excite!

Sometimes indeed theſe inward Pangs drive Men, as it was intended they ſhould, to deep Humiliation, to Prayer for Pardon, to laying hold on God's Mercy through the Merits of Chriſt, to zealous Amendment, through the

[c] Wiſd. xvii. 11. [d] Iſa. lvii. 20. [e] Pſ. xliv. 15.

Aid

Aid of the holy Spirit. And then it is doubtleſs happy to have felt them; but by no Means to have committed the Iniquity, that cauſed them: for an equally devout Application to Heaven with a greater Degree of Innocence, would have been ſtill more graciouſly received, and more bountifully rewarded: unleſs they to whom *many Sins are forgiven, love much*[f], and work diligently in proportion; which many unqueſtionably have done: but who can promiſe himſelf that he ſhall do it, and ſhall be allowed to experience the Joy of doing it? On the contrary, as the Self-Condemnation, which produced this mighty Change muſt have been extremely painful during the Accompliſhment of it; ſo afterwards, and perhaps long afterwards, it may prove a Burthen heavy enough to convince a very ſevere Convert, that an early and continued Obedience would have been much preferable to his trueſt Repentance. And therefore, as moſt Sinners endeavour to quiet themſelves with a Proſpect of Repenting ſome Time or another, they ought moſt ſeriouſly to conſider, what Remorſe and Dejection they are treaſuring up for themſelves in the mean while, though they ſhould do at laſt what ſuch artful

f Luke vii. 47.

Offenders have little Cauſe to believe they ever ſhall. Obſerve but the Caſe of thoſe, to whom the Text immediately relates. They were *made free from Sin*, as the next Verſe tells us, they had *brought forth Fruit unto Holineſs*, they were in the Way to *everlaſting Life:* yet the Apoſtle calls their paſt Faults, knowing doubtleſs what he ſaid, *thoſe things whereof ye are now aſhamed.* And indeed let any one in the ſame Condition ſay, whether his Comforts are not often embittered, and his Proſpect clouded, by mortifying Remembrances of his former Tranſgreſſions: whether he hath not frequently returning Doubts of God's Forgiveneſs; whether he well knows how to forgive himſelf.

But very commonly Shame comes at laſt to ſurround the Sinner on all Sides in ſuch a manner, that he is aſhamed to repent though he perceives the Neceſſity of it in the ſtrongeſt Light: and between his Agitations of this Kind, and the Tyranny of his unlawful Deſires, authoriſed by habitual Indulgence, he is reduced to the moſt lamentable State that the preſent Life knows or can know: continuing the Practice of Wickedneſs with his Eyes open to all its Deformities and Dangers: condemning and abominating himſelf for what he

he doth, yet going on to do, what he condemns and abominates.

Thus you ſee what internal, as well as external, Sufferings, naturally belong to irreligious Courſes. It muſt however be acknowledged, that, though always to be expected, they do not always ariſe to near the ſame Height. For ſometimes the worſt of Men continue in the moſt unaccountable Proſperity, of Health, Circumſtances, and even Reputation. Sometimes alſo Education, Example, general Cuſtom, falſe Reaſoning, may in a conſiderable Meaſure take off the Shame of ſeveral Sins, and give a Sort, ſuch as it is, of Credit to them. Some Perſons likewiſe either have originally, or ſoon acquire, ſuch an Inſenſibility of Heart or giddy Thoughtleſſneſs, that they do not undergo what others do, when they have acted amiſs. And therefore, leſt any Poſſibility ſhould remain to flatter any one, that he may be wicked, and yet eſcape what he deſerves for it, the Apoſtle, to deter us effectually from Sin, hath added in the Text

III. The future Puniſhment, that awaits it, *For the End of theſe Things is Death.*

That awful Word is well known to ſignify, in many places of Scripture, a State of Miſery,

as

as Life doth of Happineſs. They are here placed in direct Oppoſition: and the Meaning evidently is what our Saviour elſewhere expreſſes: *Theſe ſhall go away into everlaſting Puniſhment; but the Righteous into Life eternal*[g].

It might be very ſufficient to determine the Choice of Man, that Wickedneſs eſſentially tends to produce Miſery to its Authors, and generally doth produce it, though now and then the Caſe were to prove otherwiſe. But God is further concerned: and the Attributes of his Nature and the Honour of his Government require, that no one Sinner ſhall ever have Cauſe, upon the whole, to rejoice in his Iniquities, and glory in his Diſobedience. If our Maker is allwiſe and almighty, he can provide for this: if he is juſt and holy, he will. For elſe this World of his would be ruled, as we ourſelves can feel, and much more then muſt He, that it ought not. Poſſibly ſo minute a regard may appear to ſome, beneath him. But if it was not beneath him to create all Things, it can never be ſo to conduct them to their proper End. If he ſuperintends continually, as he doth, even the leaſt Part and Movement of the material Creation, can it be unfit for him to watch over the

[g] Matth. xxv. 46.

Actions

Actions of rational Beings? For what is there worthy of his Attention, if they be not?

These Considerations, confirmed by our inbred Sense of the ill Desert of Wickedness, yet opposed again by Instances of its seeming Impunity, and by the frequent Calamities of the good, raised in the Minds of Men, from Age to Age, perplexing Doubts concerning the Providence of God; to which however all other things around them gave full Testimony. Sometimes they solved the Difficulty, by discovering that the seeming Happiness of the Wicked was not real: sometimes by observing that it soon ended in great Misery. Yet they were often forced to take Refuge and intrench themselves in their general Assurance of the Divine Justice; though when and how exercised, they knew not. But there being no Appearance at all of a constant and proportionate Exercise of it in this Life, the wisest and best of them reasonably concluded, there must be another, designed to rectify whatever was wrong here. Yet a future and unseen State of Existence, in which we were not to share, till our present Frame was dissolved, had the Look of an Object too remote for human Faculties to discern with Certainty: so that many good

Men were tempted to queſtion it; and thoſe of an oppoſite Character too eaſily brought themſelves to diſbelieve it. At leaſt the Convictions and Preſages of it, which they induſtriouſly ſtifled, had no uniform Influence on their Conduct. And therefore, after various Intimations of this great Truth given from above, to the earlieſt and following Ages, for ſome Confirmation of what Reaſon ſuggeſted, God hath made it fully known to us Chriſtians that *he hath appointed a Day, in the which he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs by that Man whom he hath ordained*[h]: *a Day of Wrath and Revelation of his righteous Judgment; when he will render to every Man according to his Deeds: to them that obey not the Truth, but obey Unrighteouſneſs, Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguiſh, upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil*[i]. So that now, to uſe the Words of *Job*, *Hell is naked, and Deſtruction hath no Covering*[k].

Here then is a Conſideration, before which all that can be ſaid or imagined in Favour of Sin vaniſhes at once. And were it conſtantly as productive of Pleaſure and Profit and Eſteem in the World, and as conſiſtent with Peace in our own Breaſts, as it uſually is the contrary.

[h] Acts xvii. 31. [i] Rom. ii. 5, 6, 8, 9. [k] Job xxvi. 6.

yet

yet would not a Moment's Deliberation be neceſſary in order to renounce it. For what God will puniſh, never let Man hope to be happy in.

The very Apprehenſion of his puniſhing, the *fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation*[l], which no one, who believes in God and diſobeys him, can poſſibly avoid long together, is enough to ſour the very ſweeteſt of unlawful Enjoyments, and in the Midſt of Mirth to ſink the Heart with Heavineſs. Let every Sinner conſult his own Heart, if it be not. Or how little ſoever he may feel or dread this at preſent, yet no one can tell, how ſoon and how deep *the Arrows of the Almighty* may be fixed *within him, the Poiſon of them drink up his Spirit,* and *the Terrors of God ſet themſelves in Array againſt him*[m]. Or could he go on ſpeaking Peace to himſelf through Life, yet the Approach of Death may rouſe him on a ſudden from this Dream, and croud ſuch Horrors into the ſmall Remainder of his Days, as will far exceed the longeſt Enjoyments of paſt Sin; Horrors accompanied with the inſupportable Aggravation, that ſo far as Man can judge, they ſeize him too late to do Good.

[l] Heb. x. 27. [m] Job vi. 4.

But what avails it, if the wicked could eſcape the previous Fears of Judgment, ſince they cannot eſcape the Judgment itſelf? *For behold the Day cometh, that ſhall burn as an Oven, and all that do wickedly ſhall be Stubble; and the Day that cometh ſhall burn them up ſaith the Lord of Hoſts*[n]. As to the Particulars of this Puniſhment, Curioſity is by no means the Diſpoſition it was intended to raiſe: and for the Degree and Duration of it, we are incompetent and partial Judges of our own Deſerts, even in our moſt ſerious Hours; and much leſs are we qualified in the Seaſons of thoughtleſs Gaiety and bold Self-confidence. God alone knows what is juſt and requiſite: and from his Declarations we muſt learn our Fate; whoſe Threatnings are in all Reſpects as alarming as Words can deſcribe; and we may aſſure ourſelves they will not be found vain Terrors. Undoubtedly the Sufferings of Men will be as different hereafter, as their Guilt is here. But whoſoever ſhall ſin preſumptuouſly in Hopes of a light Puniſhment, will by that very Puniſhment merit a heavy one. And who is able to conceive, to what the loweſt Degree may amount, of the Miſery that will then proceed, from the final

[n] Mal. iv. 1.

and

and exemplary Vengeance of Omnipotence on impenitent Offenders, from the bitter Reflections of their own Consciences on their Folly and Vileness, in first disobeying God, injuring their Fellow-creatures, perverting themselves, then refusing the Reconciliation which their Creator offered them, their Redeemer died to obtain for them, their Sanctifier was ready to apply to them; and lastly from the Absence of all Comfort and all Hope in those Regions, *where their Worm dieth not, and their Fire is not quenched*[o]? *For such are the Dwellings of the Wicked*; *and this is the Place of him, that knoweth not God*[p]. *Can thy Heart endure, or can thy Hands be strong, in the Day that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it*[q].

The Subject is much too dreadful to be enlarged on farther: and it would ill become, did not the Ministry committed to us require it, one Sinner to denounce against another, Terrors like these. Far be it from us to *make the Heart of the Righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad*[r]; or affright the penitent, humble, vigilant Believer with *devouring Fire* and *everlasting Burnings*[s], instead of teaching them to

[o] Isa. lxvi. 24. Mark ix. 44, 46, 48. [p] Job xviii. 21. [q] Ezek. xxii. 14. [r] Ezek. xiii. 22. [s] Isa. xxxiii. 14.

rejoice and triumph, that *there is no Condemnation to them, who are in Christ Jesus*[t]. But whatever wilful or habitual Transgressor, whatever Person hitherto indifferent or inattentive to the State of his Soul, at any Time hears us, to him we must say, if there be any Conviction of your Danger awakened in your Breast, do not suppress it, do not run away from it, do not suffer Company, Amusement or Business to wear it off: but go, and in secret bewail yourself before God, earnestly beg Pardon and Grace for the Merits of your crucified Redeemer, throw yourself entirely on the Mercy freely offered in his Name, firmly resolve, in Confidence of his Strength, not your own, against all Sin, all Imprudence, all Negligence for the future; and recollect every Day of your Lives that solemn Admonition: *Be not deceived: God is not mocked: whatsoever a Man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his Flesh, shall of the Flesh reap Corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap Life everlasting*[u].

[t] Rom. viii. 1. [u] Gal. vi. 7, 8.

SERMON III.

GAL. vi. 10.

As we have therefore Opportunity, let us do Good unto all Men: especially unto them, who are of the Household of Faith.

WE are all born with a natural Principle of Love to our Kind: we all see and feel the Exercise of it to be fit and right: and the continual Need, which we have, of the Service and Friendship of others, continually reminds us to be serviceable and friendly in our Turns. Were Men universally so, the World would be as happy, as our Endeavours can make it. And though it is not universally so, but far otherwise; yet whoever determines to practise this Duty himself, let those around him do as they will, is sure to find his Account in the Course, which he takes. For he will generally acquire a large Share in the Esteem and good Offices of Mankind; especially of those

whom he values: and he will always experience a delightful Consciousness of intending well to them, and deserving well from them. But his chief Advantage beyond Comparison is, that if his kind Actions proceed from a devout Sense of God's commanding them; and humble Trust in the Aid of his holy Spirit for performing them; and a lively Faith in the Merits of his blessed Son for the Acceptance of them; he will then be intitled to the present Protection and final Approbation of his Maker and Judge: who hath declared, that our Treatment of our Brethren shall be a principal Rule, by which he will go in his Treatment of us. The Truth of these things is universally acknowledged: the Inference, that we are most highly concerned to be mutually useful, is extremely evident: and yet of how very little Use are most of us, compared with what we might be; and how much do we lose and suffer by our Neglect!

The Causes of so general a Failure undoubtedly are various. Reciprocal Provocations and Resentments are both a powerful and a common one. Another, still more extensive, is, that wrong judged Selfishness, which possesses Men with such a blind Eagerness for their own Interest,

Intereſt, that they cannot allow themſelves to ſtay and think, in what it conſiſts; and thus they fail of receiving, as well as communicating, the Satisfaction, which a different Conduct would produce. But beſides theſe, others, by no Means ill diſpoſed towards their Fellow-creatures, contribute much leſs to their Benefit and Comfort than they might, either from not obſerving how frequently Occaſions for it preſent themſelves, or from not diſtinguiſhing rightly the proper Objects of their humane Intentions. And therefore it may promote conſiderably the Practice of this Duty, if we make ſome Reflections, as the Text leads us,

I. On the Opportunities, which we have, of doing Good.

II. On the Choice of the Perſons, to whom we do it.

I. The Opportunities. Now theſe are ſo many, of one Sort or another, that ſome have underſtood the Apoſtle to ſpeak here of our whole Life, as one continued Opportunity. And therefore, in the Sentences before the Communion, his Words are tranſlated, *While we have Time, let us do Good unto all Men.* Life is the Time allotted for this Purpoſe. It muſt be for ſome End, that we are placed together

in

in Society: and it could not be for a worthier, than to copy and perfect in ourselves the Image of our Maker, by cultivating and exerting a benevolent Spirit, one towards another. We were purposely made so necessitous and mutually dependent, that Means for the Exercise of mutual Goodness might never be wanting. And indeed scarce a single Part of our Behaviour is of so wholly an indifferent Nature, but some of those about us will be, more or less, the better or the worse for it.

Consider, what unceasing Opportunities there are of acting agreeably or disagreeably, even in the slightest Intercourses of human Life. One shall be, as the Son of *Sirach* expresses it, *like a Lion in his House*[a]: terrible to all who approach him, especially at Times; and perhaps for no Manner of Reason; no good one, to be sure. Another shall be cold and dry, dark and distant: and perplex, as well as offend, such as have to do with him. A third, by the habitual or unseasonable Melancholy of his Looks and Discourse, shall banish all Comfort from the Place, in which he lives or appears. How vastly preferable to this unsociable Deportment is a Behaviour of constant univer-

[a] Ecclus iv. 30.

ſal Humanity; a Care to contribute, on every common Occaſion, to the Peace and Eaſe and innocent good Humour of thoſe, with whom we converſe!

Poſſibly ſuch Matters may be thought too inconſiderable to be mentioned in this Place. But the Scripture hath mentioned them. *Courteouſneſs* is expreſsly enjoined there [b]. *A merry Heart doth Good like a Medicine* [c]. And indeed, far from being ſmall things, they are very great ones. Many have ſo tender a Senſibility of Mind, at leaſt in reſpect of thoſe, with whom they are nearly united by Nature or Choice, that the very Happineſs of their Lives depends on their receiving gentle and affectionate and encouraging Treatment. Again: the Expectations of many concerning their moſt ſerious worldly Intereſts are likely to ſucceed or fail, juſt according to the Regard, that ſuch or ſuch a Perſon hath for them: and therefore every minute Alteration in his Countenance or Speech to them, makes a conſiderable one in their Way of thinking of their own Condition.

Nay, without any thing ſo particular, in all Circumſtances, unkind, or merely negligent Behaviour gives Men Pain, and may do them

[b] 1 Pet. iii. 8. [c] Prov. xvii. 22.

further

further Prejudice: while on the other Hand, not only the more important Evidences of good Will ſupport and revive the Spirits, but the ſlighter Expreſſions of it have no ſlight Effects on thoſe, to whom they are ſhewn. We commonly ſet about greater things with the Temper, into which little ones put us. And therefore, if we come to them ſoured and diſguſted, tho' perhaps it be owing to ſomewhat entirely unconnected with them, we ſhall be apt to judge unfavourably, to proceed in what lies before us with Harſhneſs, and be very different Creatures from ſuch, as nothing hath chanced to ruffle. It is alſo by repeated Acts, that Habits are acquired: and therefore, if we are often diſcompoſed, though it be about Trifles, the State of our Minds will be gradually formed by the Impreſſion, which thoſe Trifles make. Beſides, great Opportunities of exerciſing Humanity fall, comparatively ſeldom, in our Way: but theſe lower Demonſtrations of Friendlineſs we can all give continually: ſo that were each of them ſingly of much leſs Value than it is; yet frequent Repetitions of them, like a Multitude of ſmall Sums, would ſwell the Account beyond Imagination. And a further Conſideration ſtill is, that many other Inſtances of

Kindneſs

Kindneſs only provide Men with Materials for the Enjoyment of Life; which they may have in Plenty, and enjoy it ſcarce at all the better: whereas amicable and obliging Demeanor adds directly to the Enjoyment itſelf.

But I proceed now to our ſeveral Opportunities of what is more uſually called *doing Good:* though indeed there would be little need of ſpecifying them, if Men would but attend to what paſſes in the World, with the View, which they ought. Where Diſtreſſes and Sufferings are ſo common, the Occaſions of preventing, or removing, or alleviating them, can ſeldom, if ever, be far from us. But our Attention, for the moſt part is paid, not to thoſe who want it, but from whom we can promiſe ourſelves the moſt profitable Returns for it. As to the Afflicted and Helpleſs, if we do not, what is too often done, take the Advantage of inſulting or oppreſſing them, at leaſt we are extremely prone to avoid and ſlight them; though, before their Misfortunes, they had perhaps received many Profeſſions of Reſpect and Service from us, and poſſibly merited them by Service done us. Yet we can make their Difficulties the Entertainment of our idleſt Converſation with perfect Unconcern: be

wondrous

wondrous wiſe and happy in pointing out and aggravating their ill Conduct: and if we do but drop an unmeaning Declaration of being ſorry for them; or gratify our Spleen by cenſuring thoſe, who are more immediately bound to aſſiſt them, and yet omit it; then we think we have diſcharged our Duty abundantly. Nay, even when the Care of them belongs to us in particular, we can make falſe Pleas of Inability; or invent, or however improve, little Subjects of Reſentment againſt them, when all Reſentment, how well grounded ſoever, ſhould be utterly forgotten, and loſt in Compaſſion.

While Men are of ſuch a Diſpoſition, no Wonder if they ſee but a few Opportunities of doing Good. Nothing can make them viſible, if we blind ourſelves purpoſely. But let there *be firſt a willing Mind*[d], and Caſes enough, God knows, too many, will preſent themſelves, and call aloud for Aſſiſtance. The need of Study will be, not how to find out Wants, but how to ſupply them. And yet, were we, beſides taking Notice of what forces itſelf upon us, to ſet apart now and then, a little Time for conſidering wherein we could be helpful to any about us; or to enquire, if no Occaſion offer-

[d] 2 Cor. viii. 12.

ed amongſt them, where elſe we could meet with fit Objects of Benevolence, it would ſurely be nothing more, than the Condition of human Nature, the Sympathy of Man with Man, and of Chriſtian with Chriſtian, recommends to us all.

It is very true, moſt Perſons ought to fix their Thoughts chiefly on their own Buſineſs: and if they neglect that for the ſake of ſerving others, may do great Injuſtice to thoſe, for whom they ſhould be principally concerned, and ſoon come to want the Help, which they go out of their Way to give. But ſtill there are many diſengaged enough from private Cares, to make the good of their Neighbours their principal Concern. And God who hath given them Leiſure for it, will expect it from them. Nay indeed ſometimes, the more Affairs Men have upon their Hands, the more Ability they have on that very Account, of being uſeful, in various Methods, to their Fellow-creatures: And whoever will keep the Deſire of doing Good preſent always to his Mind, will eaſily diſcern many more Opportunities for it, than any one elſe can poſſibly point out to him.

It may however be expedient to mention ſome diſtinctly. But the particular Advantages for this Purpoſe, which Perſons of high Rank,

Rank, Magiſtrates, Parents, Maſters, Teachers, or any others, have by Virtue of their reſpective Stations, though deſerving their utmoſt Regard, and too many for me to enumerate now: and therefore I ſhall only ſet before you ſome of the Means, by which, independently of ſuch Relations, we may be ſerviceable to each other.

They, whom greater Abilities, or cloſer Attention, or more Experience, have made better Judges, either of the Conduct of Life in general, or of ſuch and ſuch Affairs in it, muſt frequently have noble Opportunities of directing the ignorant, and ſetting the miſtaken right; of preventing the Diſtreſſes of this World, and even the Puniſhments of the next. Advice indeed, is too commonly given ſo as to produce little, if any, deſirable Effect: at improper Times, in a haughty and provoking Manner, perhaps with a viſible Intention of only ſhewing our Authority, or ſuperior Wiſdom. And therefore it exaſperates and hardens, inſtead of convincing and reclaiming. Nay, it may be feared, there are thoſe, who had rather their Counſel ſhould not be followed; that they may triumph in publiſhing afterwards the ill Conſequences of diſregarding it. But they, who really deſire to do Good in this Way, and will

apply

apply themſelves with any Degree of that Care to prevail with others, which we uſe in bringing them over to ſerve our own private Intereſts, (and in Truth, doing Good is our moſt important Intereſt) may certainly diſcover many fit Seaſons and Methods of recommending Prudence, Virtue, Religion, to thoſe with whom they converſe.

Our Opinion ſometimes is directly and ſincerely aſked, in a Point of Conſequence. Then it is barbarous to refuſe it: and almoſt, if not quite, as bad, to give it with an artful Reſerve; concealing or diſguiſing ſomething material. But if Men do not aſk us: it may be they know not, whom to aſk; or how it would be taken, or have not the Courage, or poſſibly are proceeding wrong without Suſpicion. How excellent a Charity now muſt it be, in any ſuch Caſe, to do another a moſt eſſential Piece of Service of one's own Accord! Not every By-ſtander indeed, who finds himſelf inclined to dictate, is authorized to intermeddle. But real Well-wiſhers, who know the Circumſtances of an Affair, and may have Weight, ſhould not be too backward; and, for Fear of loſing their Labour, or poſſibly diſpleaſing, ſuffer another, perhaps a Friend, to fall into great Inconveni-

ences, which ſpeaking a few Words might have prevented, and ſecured his Eſteem and Gratitude ever after. Nay, if prudent Advice is not followed ſo ſoon, or ſo well, as might be wiſhed; we ought not immediately to give up any one, either in Anger or Deſpair. Good Senſe will eaſily perceive, where there is no Room left for Hope: and till then, good Nature will try on.

But indeed, when we have no Opportunity of giving Counſel to any particular Perſon, who hath taken a wrong Courſe, or is in Danger of it; being careful to ſet the Example of pious and virtuous and diſcreet Behaviour, is giving the beſt Counſel ſilently to all around us. And, if we do but join with it fit Evidences, on fit Occaſions, of our approving, in others, Innocence and Beneficence, and diſliking Folly, Wickedneſs, and Impiety, *our Light will ſo ſhine before Men*, that we may juſtly hope ſome at leaſt will be led by it to *glorify our Father, which is in Heaven*[f], and become happy here and hereafter.

A ſecond very valuable and very amiable Species of Kindneſs is, expreſſing Concern for the Characters of thoſe who are unjuſtly attacked. Every one muſt be ſenſible, how ſadly

[f] Matth. v. 16.

Detraction

Detraction and Calumny prevail in the World; how many Things utterly falſe are related, and how currently believed; what aggravating Circumſtances are added, and invidious Turns given to Things in which there may be ſome Truth, quite ſufficient to alter the Nature of them; and how much, not only of Vexation, but Miſchief, is cauſed, both by the malicious and the wanton Liberties, taken in this Reſpect. Here then opens to us a large Field of performing moſt uſeful and acceptable Services one to another; which muſt, in the End, redound alſo to our own Quiet and Security; by ſhewing a general Diſtaſte of Slander; and, where we can, the particular Reaſons for diſbelieving it. For we ought no more to let the Reputation, than the Perſon, of any one be wounded, if we can prevent ſuch Cruelty. But, above all, we ſhould contradict Falſhoods, when we are known to be acquainted with the Truth: elſe we ſhall be underſtood to confirm them. Indeed, Oppoſition made to injurious Reports, by ſome Perſons, at ſome Times, eſpecially of epidemical Unreaſonableneſs, may be to little Purpoſe. But then it is the peculiar Duty of ſuch as have Credit and Influence, to ſtop the Progreſs of ſuch Wickedneſs: not to let it go on, and ſe-

cretly rejoice in it becauſe it ſerves their Turn; but honeſtly do Juſtice to their keeneſt Adverſaries; and conſider Enmity, as a peculiar Advantage for doing it effectually: becauſe our Teſtimony in their Favour will be ſure to obtain Belief. And making this Uſe of our Situation will not only be truly Chriſtian, and ſingularly generous; but the likelieſt Method, either of putting an End to the Difference, which ſhould always be our firſt View, or of continuing it, if it muſt continue, with great Honour to ourſelves.

A third Way of being uſeful is, paying due Regard to the worthy and able, wherever we find them: ſhewing Countenance to ſuch, inſtead of thoſe who deſerve or want it not: aſſiſting them, when they ſet out with leſs favourable Circumſtances of Friends or Fortune, or cannot ſubmit to the uſual Arts of advancing themſelves, and are puſhed back by the forward Boldneſs of other Competitors. Or, if we are not able to ſerve them ourſelves, at leaſt we may contribute to make their Merit known: and particularly to ſuch as can help them, and perhaps may be glad of their Help: ſo that we may do a great Kindneſs to both at once. And if ſuch Occaſions do not offer, it may frequently be worth while to beſtow ſome

Pains

ſome Pains in Search of them: not contenting ourſelves with Wiſhes in their Behalf, when a moderate Degree of Diligence would procure them what we wiſh; nor counting the Happineſs of a deſerving Perſon ſo ſmall a Matter, and our own Trouble ſo very great a one, as to make a Difficulty of taking a few Steps, that we ſhould not have choſen elſe, when it may promote ſo deſirable an End.

Theſe, and others that might be mentioned, are unexpenſive Ways of doing Good: which generally will enlarge, not reſtrain, our Capacity of doing more. But the moſt uſual Notion of this Duty is communicating of our Plenty to ſupply the Neceſſities of our poor Brethren. And Wealth may often be expended to the great Benefit of others, yet at the ſame Time, with no mighty Loſs, if not a Proſpect of Gain, to ourſelves. For as the beſt Method of relieving the able Poor is employing them; ſo there are many, who, if they would contrive for it, might employ them to their own Profit: as others might in ſuch Works, as would be Conveniences, Ornaments, and rational Amuſements. And ſo far as helping them to live comfortably is the real Motive of theſe things, they are all real Charities.

But ſuppoſing that we have no other Way of doing Good by laying out Money, than what in Strictneſs of Speech is called Alms; beſtowing without Expectation of any Return from the Receivers: there are very few, but can give in this Manner, now and then, enough to be a moſt welcome Relief to one or another of the wretched Objects every where to be found. And many more than do, can afford frequent and large Liberalities, of various Kinds. Now theſe greatly miſtake, if they imagine, that the Duty of Beneficence out of their worldly Subſtance is ſufficiently diſcharged by ſome ſmall and almoſt inſignificant Diſtributions to the loweſt Part of the Poor. As the Providence of God hath placed different Perſons in different Stations; whatever is truly requiſite (for I ſpeak not of ſuch imaginary Wants, as Vanity and Fancy frame; but whatever is really needful to ſupport Men decently in the Rank, which Propriety obliges them to maintain, is nearly as neceſſary to them, as meaner Accommodations are to others. And if they have much leſs, their Difficulties and Straits may be extremely pitiable: which is one thing, that merits the careful Attention of the Rich; eſpecially with regard to their Relations, Friends, and Dependants. But indeed we ſhould all attend

tend to every thing, from whence a Claim upon us, either of Mercy or of Bounty can ariſe.

Many perhaps have not ſufficient Knowledge of particular Perſons in Diſtreſs to beſtow amongſt them ſo much as they ought to beſtow in Charity. But it is eaſy for them to find thoſe, who have. And if they are unwilling, though it muſt be without Reaſon, to trouble or even to truſt ſuch; there are public Charities of various Kinds, in any of which, both the ſmalleſt and the largeſt Sums may be undoubtedly well employed.

It is true, extending our Bounty ſo wide may cramp our other Expences: and poſſibly ſo much the better. It may prevent or leſſen the Increaſe of our Fortunes: but that may well happen, without the leaſt Harm done us. What we have no occaſion for, and probably never ſhall, can be of no Value to us. And therefore, as it is impoſſible, that Men ſhould for ever have Occaſion to lay up ſtill more for their Families, there muſt be Multitudes to whom parting with what will make many of their Fellow-creatures laſtingly happy, is in Effect parting with nothing. But where it is ſomething, and even much; ſurely the Conſideration, for which we part with it, the Good of one or more of our Brethren, is a very juſt

and weighty one: besides that our own Good is most deeply concerned in it, as I hope you have seen. Indeed, had we no other Inducements to Acts of Charity, it would be adviseable to do frequently such as are adapted to our Abilities, were it only to prevent the Love of Money from fixing and growing upon us, and to mortify that wretched Craving for more, by withdrawing from it Part of its Food.

But all Motives of worldly Prudence in favour of any Kind of Beneficence, are infinitely weaker, than those, by which Religion invites us to every Kind: the Love, the Example, the Command of our Maker and Redeemer; enforced by the Assurance, that we are then employing most wisely our Thoughts, our Time, and our Property, when they are spent in the most judicious Endeavours, that we can use, to serve and benefit any Part of Mankind; and are then most effectually securing our own Interest for ever, when we shew the most affectionate and extensive Concern for the Interests of those around us, in proportion to the Importance of each. *As we have therefore Opportunity, let us do Good unto all Men. And let us not be weary in Well-doing: for in due Season we shall reap, if we faint not*[g].

[g] Gal. vi. 9.

SERMON IV.

GAL. vi. 10.

As we have therefore Opportunity, let us do Good unto all Men: especially unto them, who are of the Household of Faith.

IN discoursing on these Words, I have already shewn, what various Opportunities we have, of promoting the Happiness, and preventing, removing, or alleviating the Afflictions of our Fellow-creatures: by the good Nature and Courtesy of our common Behaviour to them; by Information and Counsel occasionally given them; by a due Concern for their Characters and Reputations; by our Countenance, Favour, and Interest; and, if their Condition require it, by assisting them with our Substance also.

I proceed therefore at present, as I originally proposed, to shew you

II. Who are the proper objects of our Kindness.

Now

Now concerning this, the only general Rule undoubtedly is that of the Text: *Let us do Good unto all Men.* He, who hath *created us in his own Image*[a], *is loving unto every Man; and his Mercy is over all his Works*[b]. *He maketh his Sun to rise on the Evil and on the Good, and sendeth Rain on the Just and on the Unjust*[c]. We ought therefore to approve ourselves *the Children of the Highest*, by being *merciful, as our Father also is merciful*[d]: and, whatever Station the Wisdom of his Providence hath allotted us, fill up the Sphere of our Influence, be it greater or less, with Acts of Kindness. The Affection of Benevolence was planted in us, and the Exercise of it enjoined us, not for the Advantage of some few Particulars, but of all human Kind: and whoever is capable of being the better for us, ought to be the better; if we can make him so, without neglecting others, who have stronger Claims upon us.

In many Cases, which I have mentioned to you, doing the most important Service to one Person, will not at all diminish our Ability of doing as great to others. Communicating of our Property indeed will: and here we are not

[a] Gen. i. 27. [b] Psal. cxlv. 9. [c] Matth. v. 45.
[d] Luke vi. 35, 36.

to

to underſtand our Saviour's Precept, *Give to every Man that aſketh of thee*[e], in the utmoſt Extent of the Words, any more than ſeveral other of his Precepts. *Giving to every one* thus, unleſs it were ſo little as to be of no Uſe, would ſoon diſable us from giving to any one; indeed from ſupporting ourſelves. And therefore his Meaning muſt be only, that no Perſon ſhould be excluded; either out of Selfiſhneſs, which is a common Fault, or out of Malignity, as the *Samaritan* Woman at firſt would have excluded him for being a *Jew*[f], and as many of the *Jews* excluded the Heathens for being Idolaters: but that we ſhould extend our Beneficence to all of all Sorts, on proper Occaſions, as far as can be reaſonably expected.

Suppoſe therefore an entire Stranger to apply for our Charity: if the Law provides a Method, as in this Nation it doth, by which the Truth of his Complaint may be examined, and Relief granted him, in Caſe it proves to be true; directing and referring him to that, will ordinarily ſpeaking, be ſufficient; and doing more will encourage idle Vagrants and Cheats. But if the legal Proviſion doth not reach to his Caſe; or if the Officers intruſted with it are ſo

[e] Luke vi. 30. [f] John iv. 9.

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hard-hearted as to reject him; (which is too frequent;) and we have Means to find out, and Leisure to inquire, whether he wants Help; and have Cause to think he doth, and are able to give it him; it is Relation enough to us, that he is of the same Nature with us; and Recommendation enough, however unacquainted with him we were before, that his Necessities have brought him to our Acquaintance now.

Suppose farther, that such a one is of a different Party, a different Country, a different Religion, from our own; these things ought to be no Bar in the least to any needful good Offices from us: and we shall do the more Honour to the Party, the Country, the Religion, of which we are, the more tender Compassion we shew him.

Farther still: let Persons have done us Injuries; let those Injuries be as great as we think them, though they seldom or never are in Reality: yet they remain human Creatures, which alone requires of us Humanity towards them: and we have perhaps also injured them; at least in other Instances we have offended both God and Man; and ought to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven.

If indeed any unnecessary Kindness will certainly, or in all Likelihood, produce Harm upon

upon the whole; whatever Appearance of good Nature, Friendſhip, Generoſity, it may wear; we muſt remember it is a falſe Appearance, and abſtain from it as immoral. But otherwiſe the Rule is, to do Service gladly to every one of our Fellow-creatures.

Not that we are bound to do them equal Service. Their Titles to it may be very unequal: and where there is a Difference, we ought to make one. Nor, be that of any one ever ſo ſtrong, ſhould we ſo exhauſt ourſelves upon any ſingle Object, as to leave Nothing for others, which in the common Courſe of Things muſt fall in our Way, and may deſerve at leaſt as much Notice. But then, on the other Hand, we muſt not reject thoſe, who need Aſſiſtance now, under Pretence of reſerving ourſelves for worthier Petitioners hereafter; be always waiting for a fitter Occaſion than the preſent, and perhaps never find it: an Artifice, which, it may be feared, ſome have employed. Indeed, Evaſions are eaſily invented, in this whole Matter of doing Good, by thoſe who ſeek for them. And all, that the Teachers of Religion have in their Power towards preventing it, is, firſt to remind Men, that every one's true Intereſt conſiſts not in fencing againſt his Duty, and get-

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ting rid of it, but in learning and performing it; then to ſtate the Grounds, which different Sorts of Claimants have to look for Kindneſſes from them: and ſo leave it, both to the Benevolent and the Selfiſh, to ſhew what they are, and take the Conſequences.

The firſt and uſually ſtrongeſt Claim, is Proximity of Kindred. They who are nearly related to us, belong immediately to our Care. Others have a Care of the ſame Kind, incumbent on them. And the Good of the whole is beſt ſecured by the due Attention of every one to his own Part. Accordingly God hath interwoven in our Nature powerful Inſtincts, which admoniſh us continually of this Obligation: and yet hath admoniſhed us of it again by expreſs Words of Scripture. *If any provide not for his own, and ſpecially for thoſe of his own Houſe, he hath denied the Faith, and is worſe than an Infidel*[g]. But then it muſt be obſerved, that *providing* plainly appears from the Context, and from the Uſe of the Word in other Places, to mean in this, not, laying up for them without End ſtill more and more, which is often no Duty at all; but, maintaining them properly out of what we have, which is always an im-

g 1 Tim. v. 8.

portant

portant Duty. And even, where both these things are needful, both may be done; and much Room left, in large Fortunes especially, for Acts of Beneficence to others. But here now is one Instance, how easy it is to make plausible Excuses for neglecting plain Precepts. What Plea can look fairer, than making Provision for those who are united to us by Blood or Affinity? And who can fix the Bounds of that Provision for another Person's Family? Yet Bounds there are, beyond which we cannot really increase their Happiness; nay, beyond which we ought not to consult their Interests. The Duty of taking Care to put them in good Circumstances is but one of many, concerning the Disposal of our Income: and if it be carried farther than is fairly consistent with the rest, great Wickedness may be committed under Colour of it, and often hath been.

Another Ground of Preference in doing Good is Friendship: which indeed we are not bound to contract with any one: but when it is contracted, (and we find our Saviour himself had his beloved Disciple) the Ties of it are by no Means to be disregarded. Friendship, when strict, comprehends a tacit Agreement and Covenant between those who enter into it, to look

upon the Concerns of each other in a great Meaſure as their own. Mere Intimacy of Acquaintance is a lower Sort of Friendſhip. Cultivating both Sorts by mutual kind Offices contributes very much to the Enjoyment of Life: and may contribute to the Improvement of each Party in Knowledge and Goodneſs, as well as to the Advancement of their worldly Proſperity. Others, it muſt be ſuppoſed, have their own Friends zealous for Them: and we are to have a proper Zeal for Ours. Not but that one, who was unknown to us before, may often, if his Merit or Want be conſiderably greater, juſtly expect, that we ſhould give him the Preference. And it is no leſs blameable, than common, to promote the Intereſts of thoſe, with whom we are connected, beyond reaſonable Bounds: raiſing them to Stations, perhaps of Conſequence, for which they are not qualified; and depreſſing, for that End, others, who have Pretenſions far better founded. Such Friendſhips are plain Confederacies againſt Equity and public Good. And if this be true, even in the Caſe of real and well choſen Friends, much more ſtrongly doth it hold in that of mere Favourites, whom we have adopted from arbitrary Fancy, or Liking to their obſequious Behaviour. For indeed

indeed worthy Characters will ſeldom condeſcend to the Meanneſſes requiſite for gaining and preſerving immoderate Degrees of Fondneſs. But were that otherwiſe, private Partialities ought never to take Place of Reaſon and Juſtice. When they do, it is falſe good Nature, and groſs Iniquity.

A third Title to peculiar Regard, is that which Perſons acquire by having done us Favours. We are in Strictneſs the Debtors of thoſe to whom we have Obligations: and ſhould always be contriving to make as prompt Payment, with as large Intereſt, as poſſible. It is perhaps one of the heavieſt Diſcouragements to uſeful and kind Actions and Undertakings, that a ſuitable Return for them is ſo ſeldom made. The Hopes of Gratitude prompt even the ſelfiſh to many obliging Deeds, of which they would not otherwiſe have thought. And the Exerciſe of Gratitude propagates and multiplies new Kindneſſes continually. We ſhould therefore treaſure it in our Memories, that if the Inequality of other Circumſtances be not very conſiderable, we are always to do Good, where we have received it. Yet ſtill, when there would be any ſhocking Impropriety in this, we muſt excuſe ourſelves for the preſent,

 and

and make the ſpeedieſt and fulleſt Amends, that we can, ſome other Way.

But beſides thoſe, who have a Right to the eſpecial Notice of ſome, there are others peculiarly intitled to the Compaſſion of all.

And the firſt Rank of theſe conſiſts of ſuch, as the Scripture calls, in a ſpiritual Senſe, *wretched and miſerable, and poor and blind and naked*[h]: who are wholly or nearly deſtitute of Chriſtian Faith and Hope, and ignorant of the indiſpenſible Rules of Life. Multitudes there are of ſuch, even in this enlightened Nation: and Multitudes more, who can ſcarce help knowing their Duty, live in almoſt a total Diſregard to it. Now their Caſe is the ſadder, as it gives little Concern to the Generality of other Perſons, and perhaps none at all to themſelves. Yet *their Feet go down to Death, their Steps take hold on Hell*[i]. Therefore, as Parents are chiefly bound to ſee, that there be none ſuch amongſt their Children; Maſters and Miſtreſſes, to look after them in their Families, and Miniſters in their Pariſhes; ſo all People are bound in Proportion to think, what they can do likewiſe towards *cauſing the glorious Light of the Goſpel to ſhine into the Hearts of Men*[k].

[h] Rev. iii. 17. [i] Prov. v. 5. [k] Cor. iv. 4, 6.

Of

Of temporal Claims to the Kindneſs of all without Diſtinction, the principal conſtant one is undoubtedly that of Poverty: eſpecially when Sickneſs or Loſſes happen, or Work is ſcarce, or Seaſons rigorous, or Proviſions dear, and many Mouths to be filled. They indeed who prefer an idle and vagabond Life of Beggary before honeſt Labour, ought not to be encouraged in it by Relief, but abandoned to the Wretchedneſs, which they chuſe. The Law of God paſſes Sentence on them, *If any one will not work, neither let him eat*[1]: and the Law of the Land corrects them juſtly for the needleſs Weight, which they hang upon Society. Nay, ſuch as cannot now labour, if they have brought themſelves into Straits by Debauchery, Negligance or Extravagance, though they muſt have ſome, yet it ſhould be a ſparing Maintenance, unleſs deep Repentance plead in their Favour. But the Diſtreſſes of thoſe, who are brought low without their own Fault, and have ſtriven to ſupport themſelves as long as they could, ſhould be alleviated with the tendereſt Pity. Eſpecially, if they be friendleſs, as well as helpleſs, this makes the Height of a compaſſionable Caſe. A Man in this Situation may nominally

[1] 2 Theſſ. iii. 10.

have many and able Friends; yet if they will take no competent Care of him, he is to be considered as really having none: and their neglecting him is far from being a Reason, why others should do so likewise.

We may indeed alledge, to excuse our Parsimony towards the Poor, that we are afraid of Impostures, and of throwing away our Charity. But then why will we not, where there is any Likelihood of Truth, make Inquiry? Believing every one, to be sure, is feeding the Unworthy with what the Deserving ought to have. But resolving to disbelieve every one is a mean Contrivance to spare our Money, which both God and Man will see through. Very possibly, after our best Care, we may sometimes be deceived. But the more Danger there is that many of our Endeavours to do Good may fail, the more Care we ought to use, that some Part however may succeed: imitating the Wisdom of the Husbandman, who commits to the Earth perhaps more than double of the Corn that he expects to bear Fruit: and observing, that under a similar Image, the Scripture hath expresly given this very Injunction. *In the Morning sow thy Seed, and in the Evening withhold not thine Hand: for thou knowest not, whether shall prosper,*

proſper, either this or that; or whether they both ſhall be alike good[m]. But one thing we certainly know, that all Attempts, directed by our beſt Judgment to the Benefit of others, will at leaſt benefit ourſelves. For they will improve in us by Exerciſe a merciful Diſpoſition; and recommend us to his Approbation, who graciouſly accepts the Will for the Deed.

Every Way of doing Good hath ſome Advantage, peculiar to itſelf: but relieving the diſtreſſed Poor hath many conſiderable ones. Uneaſineſs is much more ſtrongly felt, than Satisfaction: and therefore taking away Pain is making a greater Change for the better, than adding Pleaſure. Beſides, there is oftener Room for it: and it is commonly ſooner done, and at leſs Expence. Beſtowing what would ſcarce make one in moderately good Circumſtances happier at all, would give Comfort and Joy to great Numbers of the Indigent. And further ſtill, the Sufferings of the Poor are true and real: the Wants of others are frequently imaginary, and on ſeveral Accounts unfit to be ſupplied.

But though Poverty, I mean when joined with Sobriety and Induſtry, hath the ſtrongeſt

[m] Eccl. xi. 6.

Title to our Regard; yet the two latter alone, though accompanied with no Diſtreſs, greatly merit Countenance and Favour. Frugality and Diligence in a lawful Calling are hopeful Marks of an honeſt Mind. And it would be very hard, that they, who do their beſt, ſhould, for Want of Encouragement, fail to thrive and riſe: eſpecially conſidering, that, while they labour for themſelves, they labour for the Public too.

Theſe good Qualities are yet more deſerving of Notice when they are adorned by Knowledge and Skill. For not only every thing valuable ought to have its Value properly acknowledged; but preferring Perſons of leſs Abilities to others of greater, may occaſion many to ſuffer by their Ignorance: and it diſheartens Men from Attempts of excelling, to which they ſhould always be excited.

But the higheſt Sort of Merit, beyond Compariſon, is that which the Apoſtle ſingles out in the Text to recommend by the Expreſſion of *the Houſehold of Faith*. All good Chriſtians, being through the Grace of God conformed to his Likeneſs, and adopted by him to be Heirs of Salvation, are therefore, when taken ſeparately, called the Children of their heavenly Father;

Father; when jointly, his Family or Houſe-hold. And there being no Admittance into this Family, or Continuance in it, but by ſuch a Belief of Religion, as produces an uniform Practice of it, therefore it is called *the Houſe-hold of Faith.*

And one Reaſon for directing the primitive Chriſtians to do Good eſpecially to their Brethren in the Faith, probably was, becauſe the Generality of them were of the poorer Sort, and yet were leaſt likely to meet with Aſſiſtance from others: their Heathen Neighbours being offended by the Singularity of their Notions, and condemned by the Strictneſs of their Lives: on which Account it was very needful, that the rich Members of their own Communion ſhould conſider them in the firſt Place.

But another main Reaſon doubtleſs was, that Chriſtians were, what the Deſign of Chriſtianity is to make them, more religious and virtuous than other Men, and therefore bound to treat one another as being ſo. They were to prefer a Fellow-believer in their Benefactions, not only for belonging to the ſame Body, but becauſe *the Righteous is more excellent than his Neighbour* [n]. And this points out

[n] Prov. xii. 26.

a Way for us alſo, though *the Houſehold of Faith*, in outward Profeſſion and Appearance, is of equal Extent with our Country, to obſerve however the Spirit and Intent of the Apoſtle's Precept, by making it one great Rule of all our Charities, to be moſt liberal to the trueſt Chriſtians; that is, the moſt pious and virtuous and honeſt Perſons. In this Senſe his Direction is ſo extremely reaſonable and important, that the Heathen Emperor *Julian*, writing, 300 Years after, to the Heathen High Prieſt of theſe very *Galatians*, to whom this Epiſtle is written, could not forbear inſerting it in Words ſo nearly the ſame, that there can be no Doubt, from whom the Thought was borrowed. *Let us therefore*, ſaith he, *communicate of our Subſtance to all Men, but more freely to thoſe of good Minds*[o]. And certainly nothing can be more judicious[p].

[o] Κοινωνητεον ουν των χρηματων ἁπασιν ανθρωποις· αλλα τοις μεν επιεικεσιν ελευθεριωτερον· τοις δε αποροις ϗ πενησιν, ὁσον επαρκεσαι τη χρεια. p. 290. Ed. *Spanh.* Though επιεικεσι may ſeem oppoſed to αποροις, and therefore to ſignify what ſometimes *honeſti* doth in *Latin*, and *the better Sort* in *Engliſh*; yet I find not, that it hath that Senſe. And *Julian*, a little before, ſaith we muſt not neglect τες πενητας, αλλως τε οταν ϗ επιεικεις τινες τυχωσι τον τροπον. And *Ariſt.* Rhet. l. 1. c. 2. §. 3. uſes επιεκης for a good Man, and επιεικεια for a worthy Character.

[p] Donabit [ſapiens] aut bonis, aut eis quos facere poterit bonos. Donabit cum ſummo conſilio, digniſſimos eligens. Sen. de vitâ beat. c. 23. where, and c. 24. ſee more.

Every

Every Kind of Diſtinction ought to have a proportionable Regard ſhewn it: and therefore the higheſt and moſt honourable ought to have the greateſt. The private Prudence of acting thus, though a ſelfiſh Reaſon, deſerves Mention: that whoever aſſiſts a worthy Perſon, may be ſure to have the Favour gratefully received; and as far as poſſible, repaid: whereas on others there is no Dependance. *When thou wilt do Good,* ſaith the Son of *Sirach, know to whom thou doeſt it: So ſhalt thou be thanked for thy Benefits. Do Good to the godly Man, and thou ſhalt find a Recompence: and if not from him, yet from the moſt High*[q]. For *God, who* to ſpeak in the Language of St. *Paul, is the Saviour,* the Preſerver and Benefactor, *of all Men, but eſpecially of thoſe that believe*[r], expects us to imitate him, not only in the Univerſality of his Beneficence, but in the peculiar Notice, which he takes of the fitteſt Objects of it. And accordingly we find, that this was the deliberate, ſolemn Reſolution of the Pſalmiſt. *O my Soul, thou haſt ſaid unto the Lord, thou art my God. My Goodneſs extendeth not to thee: but to the Saints that are*

[q] Ecclus xii. 1, 2. [r] 1 Tim. iv. 10.

in-

in the Earth; even to those, who excel in Virtue; in whom is all my Delight [*].

It is one of the oldest Complaints in the World, that no sufficient Difference is made between the Good and Bad in the Distribution of Happiness. And though it belongs only to the great Judge of all to remedy this Evil completely, as he will at the last Day, yet we should every one contribute our utmost to lessen it in the mean Time. Not only the Interest of Religion requires it of us, but that of Mankind; who will always be miserable in Proportion as they are wicked: and it is encouraging Wickedness, not to encourage Virtue. This Neglect, in those who have Power and Influence, produces unspeakable Mischief: and in all Ranks downwards, it must be of far greater Consequence, than is generally apprehended, to lay hold on every Opportunity of shewing, that we respect and will befriend worthy Characters, and think no Obligation superior to that of supporting Piety and Morals in this Manner.

Thus I have gone through the chief Claims, than can be made to our Regard in doing Good. The more of them unite in one Per-

[*] Ps. xvi. 2, 3.

son,

ſon, the ſtronger his Pleas become: and if, at any Time, being divided between ſeveral, they make the Rule of our Conduct ſeem dubious; let us only take Care to preſerve an impartial Deſire of acting rightly, and we ſhall make few, if any, Miſtakes of great Importance, *The Integrity of the Upright ſhall guide them: and the Righteouſneſs of the Perfect ſhall direct his Way*[t]. Moſt of our Difficulties about the beſt Sorts, and fitteſt Objects, and requiſite Proportions of Beneficence, ariſe, it may be feared, not ſo often from real Ignorance or Doubt, as from Unwillingneſs. Let us all therefore endeavour firſt to conquer that, by reflecting ſeriouſly on the many and ſtrong Motives, that urge us *to do Good and to communicate*[u]: let us form our Minds, with the moſt aſſiduous Care, to a Temper of univerſal Benevolence and Love, not to be exerciſed now and then only, on extraordinary and diſtant Occaſions, but to animate the whole of our Behaviour to each other. To the exacteſt Vigilance over ourſelves, let us join our moſt ardent Prayers to God, that his holy Spirit, for the Sake of his bleſſed Son, may quicken, reſtrain, direct us: and then let us chearfully go

[t] Prov. xi. 3, 5. [u] Heb. xiii. 16.

on our Way: where the Caſe is plain, follow the Dictates of an honeſt Heart without Heſitation; where it ſeems perplexed, judge as well as we can, without Scruple or Terror. For we ſerve a moſt gracious Maſter: and ſo long as we ſerve him with a ſincerely right Intention, we ſhall probably ſeldom err from our Duty, and certainly never fail of our Reward.

SERMON V.

MATTH. v. 6.

Bleſſed are they, which do hunger and thirſt after Righteouſneſs: for they ſhall be filled.

WHATEVER Objections the Vain or Vicious make againſt Religion, they muſt allow, if they have any Regard to Truth remaining, not only that nothing elſe promiſes Happineſs hereafter, but that nothing is ſo likely to give Happineſs even here, as that Diſpoſition of Mind, to which Religion propoſes to bring us. For he, who loves God ſincerely, and obeys him willingly, and truſts in him cheerfully; who delights in doing Juſtice and ſhewing Goodneſs to his Fellow-creatures; and takes Pleaſure in regulating his Conduct by the Dictates of Reaſon and Scripture; ſtudying to be uſeful in his Station, and keeping his Heart ſhut againſt every hurtful Indulgence, while he opens

opens it in a proper Degree to every innocent Gratification, hath unquestionably the truest Enjoyment of his Being, that is possible. He destroys not his Health by Intemperance, nor his Fortune by Extravagance, nor his Character by criminal or mean Behaviour. He generally obtains Esteem and Friendship from others; and he always feels the most comfortable Testimony of his own Conscience. Whatever he denies himself, or parts with, it is for a valuable Consideration, the Discharge of his Duty: whatever he suffers, he escapes the greatest of Evils, Remorse and Shame; and he enjoys the greatest Good, a conscious Sense of the divine Favour, conducting him graciously through the Afflictions of this Life to an endless Felicity in the next, that shall be the more abundant for them: and where shall we find upon Earth a securer, an easier, a more joyful Situation? Right Actions, it must be owned, are often accompanied, in the Beginning of a Christian Course, with great inward Struggles. But they diminish continually, in Proportion as a right Temper is formed: and when we arrive at a proper Maturity in Goodness, we shall be intirely free from Difficulties, and absolutely at Peace.

But

But then it is objected, that allowing ſuch a State to be ever ſo happy, we have no Proſpect of attaining it in a ſufficient Meaſure to afford us any Feeling of that Happineſs. And Experience is imagined by too many to confirm this Apprehenſion. Moſt of thoſe who live either in Vice or Neglect of Piety, make at one Time or another warm Reſolutions, and, it may be, vigorous Attempts, to throw off wrong Habits and become religious. But they find it an unpleaſing, laborious, painful Work. And let them endeavour as earneſtly as they will; nay, be ever ſo much perſuaded for a while, that they have gained conſiderable Ground; they are very liable to relapſe, more or leſs, into their former Tranſgreſſions or Omiſſions, contrary to all their Hopes. Daunted at this, they draw immediately a haſty Concluſion, that Nature is not to be altered, and Cuſtom is ſecond Nature: that it would be well for them indeed, if they had that Command of themſelves, that ſome have: but how much ſoever they may envy them, they muſt of force be content with their own Condition; for it ſignifies nothing to ſtrive againſt what they ſhall never get the Maſtery of, or aſpire to what they ſhall never arrive at. And ſo they ſit down ſatisfied with this Plea,

lay aside the Thought of growing better, and then of course grow continually worse. Yet plainly, if endeavouring would prevent that only, it would be worth while: for, next to being good, being as little bad as we can, is our evident Interest, with respect to both Worlds.

But we may justly hope for much more. And that we may not doubt of it, our Saviour hath assured us of it. In the very Beginning of his Sermon on the Mount, he lays it down; *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after Righteousness: for they shall be filled.* Whoever truly desires to become pious and virtuous, and pursues that great Point in the right Method, with due Perseverance, shall never fail of attaining his End. And the whole Word of God teaches the same thing. Why then should we not believe it, and act on that Belief? If we act without it indeed; our Attempts will be as faint, as our Hopes. But *this is the Victory, that overcometh the World, even our Faith*[a]. Not a presumptuous Faith in ourselves alone: that will certainly deceive us; and is the very Cause, that so many fall to their utter Ruin, when they thought they stood firmest: but a Trust and Reliance on the promised Grace of God,

[a] 1 John v. 4.

through

through him who died to obtain for us Power, as well as Pardon; a fixed Persuasion, that *we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us*: which he doth by a double Assurance, of present Help, as well as a future Reward. This Help he hath expressly engaged to every Christian,* in every Difficulty, on the reasonable Terms, of humbly praying for it, and honestly making use of it. What should hinder us then from *working out our own Salvation*, when *God* is ready to *work in us both to will and to do*[c]; both good Desires, and the Accomplishment of them? Our bad Inclinations may be too hard for us; but not for him. He will certainly qualify us for what he commands and expects: else his Precepts would be Mockery, and his Punishments Cruelty.

But still it is alledged by many, that in fact, though they do both endeavour and pray, they cannot become good, even in their outward Behaviour; much less in their Hearts. And perfectly good we do not say they can become at present: but why not sufficiently to enjoy from it much Peace and Comfort? Let us examine the pretended Impossibility of this a

c Phil. ii. 12, 13.

little more diſtinctly. It is confeſſed, our ſpiritual Frame is weak, and was grievouſly diſordered by the Fall. But however, though *in our Fleſh*, to uſe the Words of the Apoſtle, *dwelleth no good thing*, yet *after the inward Man we delight in the Law of God*[d]. Through his Mercy we have ſtill right and worthy Principles, as well as wrong and bad ones. We have ſtill Diſpoſitions in our Breaſts, to eſteem and honour Goodneſs, to be grateful for Benefits, to obſerve the Commands and ſubmit to the Diſpoſal of a juſt, wiſe, and kind Superior. Now theſe, directed to their propereſt Object, Almighty God, are Love, Obedience and Reſignation to him, in which conſiſts a Spirit of Religion. We have alſo by Nature, not only tender Affections in the nearer Relations of Life, but a general Senſe and Approbation of Honeſty and Truth, of Good-will, Pity, and Forgiveneſs towards all with whom we have to do: and theſe things comprehend our Duty to our Neighbour. Then, as to what we owe to ourſelves: reaſonable Creatures muſt think Reaſon ought to be followed, rather than Paſſion and Appetite; muſt condemn the Exceſſes, that deſtroy

[d] Rom. vii. 18, 22.

their

their Underſtanding or Health; and be ſhock-ed at Violations of Decency and Modeſty. So that, in Truth, we have the Seeds within us of every thing good, as well as evil. And all we need is, to cultivate the one, and pluck up the other, and we are what we ſhould be. It is acknowledged, we have not Strength of our own to root out our Vices: and our Virtues will never bear Fruit, without kindly Influences from above. But ſince God is ready to give us all we really want, we may labour with full as much Aſſurance of ſucceeding, as if we had it of our own.

There are Inſtances but too many, of Perſons bringing themſelves into Habits contrary to Reaſon and Nature: why ſhould it be impoſſible to acquire ſuch, as agree with both? We can abſtain from Faults, for which we have ever ſo great a Love, when our Intereſt requires it, when ſome favourite Purſuit or Fancy is ſerved by it. This cannot therefore, in general, be extremely difficult: for very often the Motive of ſuch Self-denial is trifling enough. And why do we then perſuade ourſelves, that Love of God and our Duty, and Hope of eternal Happineſs, and Fear of eternal Miſery, cannot have an equal

Influence upon us? The Truth is, we need but try heartily, and we ſhall find it can; ſhall find that we are able by a firm Reſolution, founded on Faith in Heaven, to abſtain from any one ſinful Action whatever: and therefore, by repeating the Reſolution, from any Number of ſuch Actions.

Indeed merely reſtraining the outward Acts of Vice is not being virtuous: Virtue conſiſts in the inward Diſpoſition of the Heart. But a Courſe of ſuch Reſtraints uniformly carried on with that View, will as certainly, in Time, change our Diſpoſitions in this Reſpect, as we ſee it doth in all others. We grow contented, and pleaſed, by Degrees, with every Place, and every Way of Life, we are put into: and become fond at laſt, of what we were once quite indifferent about; nay, of what we diſliked very much. But beſides the general Force of Cuſtom, there is a peculiar Complacency, connected by our Maker with the Performance of our Duty; which the longeſt Habit of Sin, cannot ſo intirely extinguiſh, but that, whenever we return to the right Way, our Heart will applaud us for every Step we take; joyful Proſpects will open to us, and invite us on through every Difficulty; till at length we ſhall

ſhall get beyond them, and find *the Ways of Wiſdom Pleaſantneſs; and all her Paths, Peace*[e].

Perhaps this may not be ſo ſoon, as we could wiſh or expect. Yet, not uncommonly, God meets the very firſt Advances, that he hath inclined Men to make towards him, and changes their Hearts almoſt totally at once. But be it ever ſo long, what have we elſe to do, but go on and wait his Time? Attaining a religious State of Mind is not a Matter, at which one would aim only if it could be acquired in a ſhort Space, and with little Trouble. It is the great, the one thing that we have to be concerned about in Life: what muſt be done, or we are miſerable; and if once done well, makes us happy for ever. Therefore, how ſlow or how difficult our Progreſs may be, is little to the Purpoſe: we ſhould go on with more Pleaſure indeed, if we went on faſter and ſmoother: but our Buſineſs is, to go on as we can. And whoever hath Strength enough to make a Stand, may quickly have enough to gain Ground; and, by purſuing his Advantage, will undoubtedly at length get a complete Victory.

[e] Prov. iii. 17.

 I am

I am very ſenſible, how often this fails to be the Caſe. But the Reaſon is: either Men do not ſet about reforming themſelves with the Sincerity, the Spirit and the Prudence, that they do about other Points of Importance; or they have not Patience to perſiſt in it.

Moſt People, far from wiſhing to mend their Faults, are very unwilling to know that they have any. Now what can be the Meaning of this? In all other Employments, whoever is deſirous to do well, examines carefully into the Defects of his own Work, receives with Thankfulneſs the Judgment of his Friends, turns to Uſe even the Cenſures of his Enemies; and from whenceſoever the Knowledge of any Imperfection comes, hath no Quiet, till he hath corrected it to the beſt of his Power. But is it thus we act in the Government of our Hearts, and the Conduct of our Lives? If not, whence comes the Difference? Doubtleſs from hence, that we are not ſo ſincere in one Caſe, as the other. It is not *Righteouſneſs*, Piety, and Virtue, that we *hunger and thirſt after*; but a fair Shew, even though it be a falſe one, to others and ourſelves. We have ſmall Regard to what promotes not this: and what leſſens it, we conſider

ſider only as an Injury and a Loſs; not at all as an Opportunity given us of reforming and improving our Hearts and Lives, notwithſtanding that we profeſs the ſtrongeſt Deſire of it.

But ſuppoſe a Perſon ever ſo deſirous to conquer ſome Vices, yet if he indulge others; or ſuppoſe he endeavours to get rid of all Immoralities, yet if he allow himſelf in Profaneneſs or Forgetfulneſs of God, his Aim is inconſiſtent, and he muſt not hope to ſucceed. Every Virtue is connected with every other Virtue: all Virtue is connected with Religion: and they will not flouriſh apart. Specious Appearances there may be: but not uſeful Realities. We muſt *hunger and thirſt after* univerſal *Righteouſneſs*, not one Part only, if we expect to be filled from above.

Nay though we ſhould wiſh to grow better in all Reſpects, yet wiſhing it faintly, and attending to it ſlightly, will never effect it. If we make Riches, or Power, or Pleaſure, or any Thing elſe of this World, our great Aim; and look upon the religious and moral Government of ourſelves as an inferior Matter; not to be overlooked indeed, but requiring only ſo much Regard, as theſe more important Affairs will

admit; our Improvement in it will be very little, if any at all: *For we cannot ſerve two Maſters*[f]. But did we once ſee, and will keep in Mind, that Piety and Virtue are our Buſineſs here; that forming our Hearts to a practical Eſteem of Reaſon and Truth, to a Temper of Juſtice and Goodneſs towards Men, of Reverence and Obedience to God, of Love to Chriſt, of Joy in the Holy Ghoſt, is our main Concern, compared with which every thing elſe is nothing: it would make a wonderful Difference, both in our Diligence and our Succeſs.

But ſtill the greateſt Diligence may fail, unleſs we proceed in a proper Method. If we reſolve againſt Sin; and will not reſolve to be on our Guard againſt the Things, that lead us into it: If we deſire to *grow in Grace*[g]; and will not uſe the Means, which God hath appointed for our Growth in it: what wonder is it, that we fail? Nay, though we take the righteſt Methods imaginable, and proceed in them, for a Time, with the greateſt Spirit: yet if, after a while, we become *wearied, and faint in our Minds*[h], and leave off; all our paſt Labour will be in vain. We cannot indeed

[f] Matth. vi. 24. [g] 2 Pet. iii. 18. [h] Heb. xii. 3.

keep

keep to the ſame Pitch conſtantly: but whenever the want of it hath betrayed us into a Fault, we can recover and raiſe ourſelves up to it again. And though a freſh Repetition of the ſame Fault were to ſucceed often; yet, Recollection and freſh Reſolution may be repeated as often, till through the Grace of God they become effectual.

But here People uſually object; they cannot reſolve againſt Sin more ſtrongly, than they have done; yet their former Reſolutions have ſtood them in no Stead: and to what Purpoſe is it to make more! Now every one ſees, how abſurd this Way of thinking would be in the Affairs of common Life. Scarce any one ſucceeds at the firſt Trial, uſually not till after many Trials, in almoſt any Thing they go about to learn. And yet what do they do? They endeavour on: and though perhaps they cannot poſſibly be more in earneſt at laſt, than they were at firſt, yet inſenſibly, themſelves know not how, they overcome the Difficulty ſo intirely, that very often neither any Feeling, nor any Notion of it remains.

Let us therefore imitate their Perſeverance; and not be impatient, and out of Hopes, becauſe of a few Failures: always think lowly of what

what we have done: but always highly of what through God's help, we may do. Being uneasy at our past Miscarriages, is indeed a Duty, so far as it teaches us to be humble, to ask Pardon, and strive to behave better. But if we do Nothing but dwell upon and aggravate our Fault to our own Minds; till we have so little Opinion of, and so little liking to, ourselves, that we have no Heart to set about Amendment; a Sensibility, thus excessive, defeats its own End; and becomes a new Sin, added to all the former [i]. We must therefore never despair, and give up our Case as incurable, and our Souls as lost: for they are not so. God is our Physician; and no Disease is too inveterate for him. We have only to study and follow his Directions faithfully, and the final Event is infallible. If we fail in our Duty; we may, if we will, from that very Failure, get more Strength and Skill for the future: by observing, through what Wrongness or Weakness in our Temper, what Rashness or Negligence in our Conduct, the Advantage

i Πρωτον μεν καταγνωθι των γινομενων· ειτα καταγνους, μη απογνως σεαυτε'—αλλα μαθε το των παιδοτριβων· Πεπ7ωκε το παιδιον; Αναςας, φησι παλιν παλαιε, μεχρις ν ισχυροποιηθης. Θελησαι δει, κ γεγονε.—ωρ παλιν απονυςαξαι, κ απωλω7εν, *Arrain Epict.* l. 4. c. 9. versus finem.

against

against us was gained; and thinking, what Precautions will be most effectual against another Trial. A moderate Share of Time and Pains, honestly spent thus, would give us happy Earnests of obtaining at length an intire Conquest: which however, though always possible, will be much the easier and surer, the earlier we prepare for and engage in the Conflict; before we give the Enemy Leisure to strengthen himself, by further weakening and corrupting us. *My Son, gather Instruction from thy Youth up: so shalt thou find Wisdom till thine old Age. Come unto her as one that ploweth and soweth, and wait for her good Fruits: for thou shalt not toil much in labouring about her, but shalt eat of her Fruits right soon.—My Son, if thou wilt, thou shalt be taught: and if thou apply thy Mind, thou shalt be prudent.—Let thy Mind be upon the Ordinances of the Lord, and meditate continually in his Commandments: He shall establish thine Heart, and give thee Wisdom at thine own Desire* [k].

But supposing the worst, that we have been negligent or even grossly sinful in time past; yet not only Reason and the Promises of Scripture, but Experience proves the Possibility of

[k] Ecclus vi. 18, 19, 32, 37.

our

our Recovery. Did not *David* recover from Adultery and Murder, *Manasseh* from Idolatry, *Zaccheus* the Publican from Covetousness and Injustice, *Peter* from denying Christ, *Paul* from blasphemingand persecuting? Have not Multitudes in all Ages, many in our own, some perhaps known to us, recovered from the vilest Acts, from the longest Habits of Sin? Why then cannot we do what they have done?

It must be confessed indeed, that some have naturally Dispositions much more favourable both to Innocence and Repentance, than others. But God hath made none of his Creatures incapable of what he made them for. And since he condescends to help us, we may be sure he will help us as much as we really want. The Weakness of Man, the Force of Temptation, the Difficulty of Duty, are of small Account, where the Almighty is ready to interpose. Our own Strength indeed cannot increase, in proportion as our Trials do: but that, which proceeds from him, can. And this is the great Felicity of our Dependance upon him, that while our Sense of continually needing his Aid is fitted, beyond all things, to keep us humble: our Assurance of having it,

if

if we will ask and use it, gives us a Comfort and a Spirit, that nothing else can equal.

God will certainly enable us to do every Thing, which is necessary to be done. And though he may possibly suffer us to strive against some of our smaller Faults, much longer and more ineffectually, than we could wish; yet we may be assured, he hath wise and good Reasons for exercising us with such Difficulties: and provided we continue *the good Fight* with Patience and Courage, whatever Labour and Pain it may cause us now, it shall not hinder, but increase our Reward hereafter: and the Prospect of that, is abundantly sufficient to make us happy in the mean while. Not that we can ever fit ourselves to appear before God, and be justified in his Sight, on the footing of a Covenant of Works. Far be from us the haughty Imagination. We desire to be accepted, not for what we have done, but for what our blessed Redeemer hath done on our Account: *and to be found in him, not having our own Righteousness, which is of the Law; but that which is through the Faith of Christ, the Righteousness which is of God by Faith*[1]. After this we are

[1] Phil. iii. 9.

to

to *hunger and thirst* both as the Means of personal Righteousness, and the Ground of God's accepting it. In this alone we are to hope first, and rejoice afterwards.

Yet still, *if in this Life only we had Hope in Christ, we might* sometimes be *of all Men most miserable* [m]. Not but that, even then, a steady Course of Virtue and Religion would in general be evidently for the Interest of Mankind, and almost of every Individual. But after all, there would be Cases too often happening, in which the Trouble of combating evil Inclinations and Habits would be so great, the Progress in Goodness so imperfect, and the Enjoyment of it so precarious and short-lived; that human Resolution must be supposed likely to stagger and faint, under such Trials. But since we are assured of enjoying to Eternity in Perfection, whatever Graces we have cultivated here with Sincerity; the Toilsomeness of the Work, and the Slowness of the Success, ought not to deter us in the least. Let the Watchfulness over our Conduct, the Restraint of our Passions, and wrong Desires, be ever so uneasy; let this Uneasiness last ever so long; let our Advancement, after doing our best, be

[m] 1 Cor. xv. 19.

mixed with ever ſuch mortifying Failures and Frailties: yet, if we be faithful unto the End, every one of theſe ſeemingly diſcouraging Circumſtances will have full Allowance made for it, and be moſt equitably conſidered to our Advantage. We have only to take care of our Duty; and the Goodneſs of our Maker will be ſure to take care of our Happineſs. Nor is it indeed, could we but think aright, of very great Conſequence, whether we begin to taſte that Happineſs, in any conſiderable Degree, during our momentary Life on Earth; which however truly good Perſons, almoſt if not abſolutely without Exceptions, do; or whether it be reſerved for that approaching Time, when all they, that have *hungred and thirſted after Righteouſneſs* here, *ſhall be abundantly filled with the Plenteouſneſs of God's Houſe, and made to drink of the River of his Pleaſures*[n]. *For with him is Fulneſs of Joy, and at his right Hand there are Pleaſures for evermore*[o]. *Therefore, my beloved Brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord: foraſmuch as ye know, that your Labour is not in vain in the Lord*[p].

[n] Pſ. xxxvi. 8, 9. [o] Pſ. xvi. 11. [p] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

SERMON VI.

JAMES i. 27.

Pure Religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the World.

TO understand the Meaning of these Words fully, it must be observed, that St. *James* wrote his Epistle to the *Jewish* Believers in Christ; many of whom were not yet sufficiently apprized, how grievously the Traditions of their Elders had corrupted Religion. For long-received Errors are seldom entirely cast off, till some Time after the Truths, which, by evident Consequence, prove them to be Errors, are embraced. These new Converts therefore, being accustomed from their Infancy to think very highly of that Purity of Faith and Worship, which was their principal Distinction from the Heathen World, continued even after they were Christians, to give

it an undue Preference to the weightieſt Duties of common Life. Their Opinion of ceremonial Worſhip indeed the Goſpel had probably lowered: but it muſt have increaſed their Eſteem of Faith. And though it was eaſy to underſtand that no Faith could be valuable, unleſs it brought forth the good Fruit of univerſal Obedience; yet wrong Inclinations led many to miſtake the Matter: who accordingly contenting themſelves with a ſpeculative Belief, and formal Devotion, thought and ſpoke ill of thoſe, who either differed from them in religious Tenets, or laid any great Streſs on moral Practice. Now had the Apoſtles indulged Imaginations and Behaviour ſo agreeable to corrupt Nature, undoubtedly they would have gained by it a much larger Number of Diſciples. But *they had not ſo learned Chriſt* [a]. Each, as Opportunity preſented itſelf, diligently oppoſed this dreadful Perverſion of *the Doctrine according to Godlineſs* [b]; but none with a warmer Zeal, than St. *James:* who, preſiding over the Chriſtians of *Jeruſalem*, muſt have had the moſt Experience of it. He therefore, throughout this whole Epiſtle, pleads earneſtly for obſerving the moral Duties, Beneficence and

[a] Eph. iv. 20. [b] 1 Tim. vi. 3.

Self-

Self-government: the latter to be exercised in our Words, as well as Actions.

But especially in the Text, he hath exalted them so high, that he may seem, and I fear hath been apprehended by some, to exclude every thing else, as unnecessary. For what Occasion is there, it may be said, to concern ourselves about Acts of Piety, when we are plainly told by an Apostle, that a good-natured inoffensive, regular Life is the whole of our Duty? Now had the Apostle told us this, he would have contradicted both Reason and himself. If right Sentiments and Behaviour be requisite in some Cases; they must in all. If the good Qualities of our Fellow-creatures deserve proportionable Esteem; the infinite Perfections of our Creator demand the highest possible Veneration. If we owe them Gratitude for the Kindnesses, which they do us; we owe beyond Comparison more to him, from whose Bounty every Object and every Capacity of Enjoyment is derived. If our earthly Superiors are intitled to Respect and Submission; the King and Lord of all hath an unspeakably stronger Claim, that we should pay him the profoundest Homage, believe his Instructions, and do his Will without Reserve, however no-

tified; be abſolutely reſigned to his Diſpoſal, truſt in his Care, and live as being always in his Preſence. If laſtly, when we have miſbehaved to a Man like ourſelves, we are humbly to acknowledge it, and condeſcend to every reaſonable Condition of Pardon; ſurely, when we have ſinned againſt our heavenly Father, we are bound to the deepeſt Self-condemnation, the moſt penitent Confeſſion, the readieſt Compliance with whatever Method, he, who alone can judge of the proper one, ſhall preſcribe for our Reconciliation.

Plainly therefore a religious and Chriſtian Behaviour is equally neceſſary with a moral one: and there can neither be Religion without feeling and expreſſing Reverence to God; nor Chriſtianity without believing the Doctrines and obſerving the Inſtitutions of Chriſt. Nor did St. *James* imagine there could. On the contrary, we find him enjoining Faith and Prayer, giving Directions about public Worſhip, and aſcribing great Efficacy to the private Miniſtrations of the Elders of the Church. Nay, in the very Text, far from excluding a Spirit of Piety, he ſuppoſes the good Deeds, which he ſpecifies, to be done with a View of appearing *pure and undefiled before God and the Father.*

Father. The Perſons, to whom he wrote, had no Doubt, whether Chriſt had commanded them to be religious: but they underſtood not fully, wherein Religion conſiſted. Therefore knowing that they wanted comparatively but little Incitement to the ſpeculative and devotional Parts; he inſiſts on the other Duties, in which they were deficient: Kindneſs to their Brethren, and virtuous Reſtraint of themſelves. Thus he completes the Scheme of Chriſtianity, in perfect Harmony with that, which St. *Paul* hath elſewhere given, by adding to the Obligations of a *godly* Life, thoſe of a *righteous* and *ſober* one [c].

To ſet his Doctrine before you in a ſtill clearer Light, I ſhall proceed to ſhew

I. What *viſiting the Fatherleſs and Widows in their Affliction* implies.

II. What *keeping ourſelves unſpotted from the World* comprehends.

III. That theſe two Things are principal Parts of *pure and undefiled Religion*.

I. What *viſiting the Fatherleſs and Widows in their Affliction* implies.

Now, in Scripture Language, to *viſit* any one is to take ſuch Notice of him, and treat

[c] Tit. ii. 12.

him in ſuch Manner, as his Condition requires. For as Inattention and Neglect are expreſſed by ſhutting the Eyes, or turning them from any one; ſo Attention and Regard, whether in order to puniſh or to ſhew Favour, are denoted by opening the Eyes, and turning them towards him; which, in our Tranſlation, is often called *viſiting*: a Word originally of the ſame Import with frequently looking upon, and contemplating. For ſeeing and knowing any Caſe, in Man ought to be, and in God is always, connected with acting ſuitably to it. *The Day of his Viſitation* therefore, when wicked Perſons or Nations are the Subject, is the Day of his Vengeance [d]: but that *the Lord hath viſited and redeemed his People*, is the higheſt Expreſſion of his Love [e]. And in one Paſſage of holy Writ, theſe different Senſes of the Word are found together in a beautiful Oppoſition. *Thus ſaith the Lord God of Iſrael againſt the Paſtors, that feed my People: Ye have ſcattered my Flock, and driven them away, and have not viſited them: behold, I will viſit upon you the Evil of your Doings, ſaith the Lord* [f]. Since therefore the proper Notice, to be taken of Perſons in Diſtreſs, is to give them all the Comfort and Re-

[d] Iſ. x. 3. [e] Luke i. 68. [f] Jer. xxiii. 2.

lief,

lief, that we can; this is what *visiting* signifies in the Text: as it doth also in our Saviour's future Speech to those on his right Hand: *I was sick, and ye visited me*[g].

To *visit* thus *the Fatherless and Widows* is, in common Acceptation, a Work, not of Justice but of Compassion; so that St. *James* differs in Phrase from St. *Paul*; according to whom the second great Duty of Religion is Righteousness. But as Righteousness there undoubtedly includes Mercy; which indeed is but Equity to our Fellow-creatures, and strict Justice to God, who hath intrusted us with the Care of them: so Mercy here must include Righteousness; without which it cannot be real and consistent. There are indeed Persons, who shew, and perhaps affect to shew, great Humanity in some Things, without Honesty of Heart in others. One Sort pique themselves on their Tenderness and Bounty, constant or occasional, to those whom they happen to like: another, on their Charity, to the Poor, or Sympathy with the Distressed, in general: a third, on their Affability and obliging Deportment to all the World. But still, on some Occasions, they will be oppressive or fraudulent, corrupt

[g] Matth. xxv. 36.

or prejudiced, cruel or negligent. Now with Men, at leaſt with the Injudicious and Inconſiderate, who make up a numerous Body, ſuch partial Virtue may often take. But God expects univerſal Rightneſs of Diſpoſition and Behaviour: and our own Conſciences, in every ſerious Hour, will reproach us, if we fail in any Branch. A Conduct in ſome Points beneficent, in others injurious, muſt of Neceſſity be leſs uſeful to Mankind than it ought: and for the moſt Part, if not always, will be hurtful on the Whole, both by its immediate Effects, and the bad Influence of its Example.

Firſt therefore the Foundation of Juſtice muſt be laid; and then the beautiful Superſtructure of Mercy will ſtand firm: which every one to his Power ſhould be induſtrious in raiſing. For the State of the World very loudly demands, that we not only abſtain from doing Harm to each other, but do every Kind of Good, that we poſſibly can. St. *James* indeed hath mentioned but one, *viſiting the Widows and Fatherleſs in their Affliction.* But our Saviour adds more Acts of Compaſſion, concerning which Inquiry will be made at the laſt Day: and though he ſeems to ſpeak as if theſe alone would determine our final State; yet he

ſpeaks

ſpeaks in the ſame Manner, of other Virtues, in his Sermon on the Mount. And not only this, but the whole Tenour of Scripture proves, that every Virtue muſt be practiſed; though frequently future Happineſs is promiſed to a ſingle one: under which, in that Caſe, all the reſt, eſpecially of the ſame Sort, are meant to be comprehended. For as they flow from the ſame Principle, and are naturally connected, they are not ſuppoſed to be unnaturally diſjoined. Thus in ſome Places the Love, in others the Fear, or even the Belief alone, of God, is put for the Whole of Religion; juſt as Kindneſs to afflicted Orphans and Widows is put here for the Whole of Benevolence.

Nor indeed was it eaſy, if poſſible, to have pitched on a more proper Specimen. Virtuous Actions are laudable only ſo far as they proceed from virtuous Motives. Now ſome Parts of kind Behaviour may be intended merely to procure a Return of the ſame: as Complaiſance and Courteſy. Others may be artful Contrivances to promote our own more important worldly Intereſts: as the Multitude of Services, great and ſmall, which Men are ſo officious in doing their Superiors. And the Vanity of raiſing a high Character may produce not a few:

few: indeed all that lie open to publick Observation. But comforting and assisting the afflicted and helpless Poor, is a melancholy, troublesome, expensive Work: and if performed with the Privacy, needful to acquit it from the Censure of Ostentation, attracts but little of the World's Regard, which is commonly fixed on Objects widely different. This Instance therefore was chosen by our Apostle with the utmost Prudence, to remind Men, that the only genuine Beneficence is that, which extends, as Opportunity offers, to the least inviting Cases.

Our Saviour himself gave a Rule of the same Tendency, when, at a large Feast, *he said to him, that bade him; When thou makest a Dinner or a Supper, call not thy Friends, nor thy Brethren, neither thy Kinsmen, nor rich Neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a Recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a Feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed. For they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the Resurrection of the Just* [h]. His Meaning was not, to forbid any of the Proprieties or Civilities of Life: much less to enjoin a perverse Affecta-

[h] Luke xiv. 12—14.

tion

tion of contradicting them. Neither his Doctrine, nor his Temper, were of this Turn. On the contrary, he wrought a Miracle once, to enable the Master of a Family to entertain his Guests more plentifully[i]. But the Custom of the *Jewish* Language, in comparing two Things, is seemingly to prohibit that, which is only designed to be represented as the less valuable. Thus in the Old Testament God saith, *I will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice*[k]; that is, I esteem it more than Sacrifice. Here then, in the same Manner, our Blessed Lord means to prefer Charity to the Poor, before Hospitality and Generosity to such as need it not: and under this one Example to intimate a general Caution, that we should not content ourselves with the Performance of the more pleasing Offices of Society; (because our Inducements to these may be doubtful) but prove to others and our own Minds, that our Goodness is real and universal, by a more than ordinary Care to fulfil those Obligations, which we should naturally be most inclined to omit. And as these are not the same in all Men; but some are aptest to fail in one Expression of Humanity, and some in another; we ought none of us to consider any single Branch, however excellent, as if it

[i] John ii. 1, &c. [k] Hos. vi. 6. Matt. ix. 13.

were

were the Whole: but each to think over the ſeveral Particulars, be they of more or leſs Moment, in which he can add to the Satisfaction, or diminiſh the Uneaſineſs of his Fellow-creatures: that ſo, by exerting a Benevolence, not laviſhed promiſcuouſly, but proportioned with Judgment, to every Perſon within the Sphere of his Influence, he may, in this Part of his Duty, *be perfect and entire, wanting nothing* [1].

Uſually indeed the Rich and Great can do Good by far the moſt effectually and extenſively. But others alſo, by Dutifulneſs or Affection ſhewn in the nearer Relations of Life, by virtuous Example, Advice prudently given, ſeaſonable Aſſiſtance, deſerved Recommendation, faithful Service, compaſſionate Sympathy, obliging Notice, innocent Chearfulneſs, and even common good Humour, may be Inſtruments, of much more Comfort and Satisfaction to all around them, than is generally imagined.

But I now proceed to ſhew you

II. What *keeping ourſelves unſpotted from the World* comprehends.

And in general it means, preſerving our Lives and our Hearts free from thoſe Vices, to which either the natural Impreſſions of ſenſible Objects, or the additional Force given them by

[1] James i. 4.

prevailing

prevailing Cuſtom, may expoſe us. Now theſe are of different Sorts. We may learn from the World Selfiſhneſs, Envy, Reſentment. But theſe interfere ſo continually both with Juſtice and Humanity, that in Effect you have been cautioned againſt them under the former Head. We may alſo learn Pride: a Sin, which taints the Mind of Man beyond moſt things: not only renders him diſagreeable and injurious, and prevents his making Reparation, though ſenſible that he owes it; but keeps him from perceiving his Faults and his Follies, and tempts him to think that Application even to God for Pardon and Aſſiſtance is beneath him. Yet with this dreadful Spirit our Nature is ſo deeply infected, and we ſtrengthen one another ſo much in it by our Behaviour, that it requires, both a ſtrict Search to find how far we are guilty of it, and uncommon Care to root it out.

But the moſt prevailing Defilement of the World is immoderate Love of Pleaſure: a Diſpoſition of worſe Conſequence, as Multitudes profeſs not to ſee the Harm of it. For they conceive ſuch exceedingly high Opinions of the Merit of good Nature, and their own Share in this Merit, that they are perfectly indifferent about every thing elſe, and violate the plaineſt Rules of Sobriety and Chaſtity without Scruple.

Yet ſuch Men will appear, when the Matter is examined, extremely deficient in the very Point, on which they reſt their Character. For they always grieve and afflict their Friends; they frequently wrong, in various Ways, thoſe, whoſe Happineſs they were bound, and perhaps had engaged, principally to conſult; they entice others into Sin, and leave them afterwards expoſed to Wretchedneſs; they introduce Diſſenſions and Diſhonour into Families, they diſorder and weaken human Society. And the Wrongneſs of their Conduct is ſo evident, that they are uſually forced by a Variety of Arts to baniſh Reflexion; that they may, if poſſible, be ignorant of their own Guilt, or at leaſt inattentive to it. For would they but conſider at all ſeriouſly, and without palliating, what unkind and cruel things they do, what good and worthy Actions their Courſe of Life obliges them to omit, and how ſtrongly their Example tends to make others perhaps worſe than themſelves; they could not fail to ſee, that whatever Pretences, and ſometimes plauſible ones, there may be to the contrary, no two things upon Earth are in Reality more inconſiſtent, than good Nature and Debauchery.

Indeed great Numbers will acknowledge this; who yet ſtrenuouſly plead, that provided they

they do nothing prejudicial to others, there can be no Harm in diverting and delighting themſelves to the utmoſt in whatever ſuits their Fancy. But beſides the prudential Objections to this Scheme, it ought ſurely to be obſerved, that in Point of Duty we are bound to live and act agreeably to the Nature given us. If Paſſions and Appetites had been the Whole of our inward Frame, we might allowably have indulged them to the full, like the reſt of our Fellow-brutes. If being alſo bleſt with Reaſon, we were taught nothing more by it, than to abſtain from hurting each other; ſo long as we obſerved that Caution, it could not condemn us. But we feel ourſelves qualified for better and worthier Occupations, than the moſt innocent Indulgences of Senſe. We experience a higher Order of Affections, endued with a rightful Authority over the reſt. Theſe it is our Buſineſs to cultivate here, in order to reap the Fruit of them for ever hereafter. And all Attachments to worldly Objects, which make us overlook the Worth, and neglect the Improvement of our own Souls, though they were not in the leaſt injurious to others, are improper and criminal Debaſements of ourſelves. Be they vehement

Purſuits or light Amuſements, groſſer Pleaſures or more refined ones; that we ſhould live to them, and fill up our Time and our Thoughts with them, as Multitudes commonly do, is altogether unſuitable to Creatures evidently formed for Attentions and Impreſſions of another Sort, rational, moral, religious. And though our preſent Situation upon Earth ſubjects us to many low Employments, and offers to us many low Gratifications, neither of which we are to diſdain, ſince they are appointed for us; yet we muſt habituate ourſelves to a Superiority over them, by fit Exerciſes of Self-denial; and both conſider and uſe them, only as being ſubſervient to nobler Purpoſes; ever fixing our chief Regard on the Duties of Life, the State of our own Hearts, the Relation which we bear to God, the ſpiritual and eternal Bliſs, for which he deſigns us. Elſe, far from being *unſpotted by this World*, we ſhall be ſo immerſed in it, as not to be *meet for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light* [m].

Accordingly the Scripture, which, coming from him, who beſt knows what is good for us, ought ſurely to be obeyed, were it ever ſo implicitly, both reſtrains our ſenſual Enjoyments

[m] Col. i. 12.

within

within certain Limits, and requires a great Disengagement from the most allowable of earthly Satisfactions and Advantages, that we may have Room in our Breast, for purer Joys. Our Lord himself hath told us; *No Man can serve two Masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon*[n]. And his Apostles have enjoined us, *Set your Affections on Things above, not on Things on the Earth*[o]. *Love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World. If any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the World, the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, is not of the Father*[p]. That is; immoderate Fondness for the Pleasures of Sense, unreasonable Delight in beholding the Increase of our Wealth, haughty Complacency in Pre-eminence and Power, are not Dispositions proceeding from God, nor consistent with a Spirit of true Religion. We cannot indeed preserve ourselves from being sollicited, perhaps from being moved and disquieted, by some or other of the Temptations that sur-

[n] Matth. vi. 24. [o] Col. iii. 2. [p] 1 John ii. 15, 16.

round us: but from yielding to them, through Divine Aſſiſtance, we may.

Nor is it neceſſary for this Purpoſe, either to retire out of Society, or live uncomfortably in it. The Duties of our Stations and ſeveral Profeſſions we muſt faithfully perform, as Part of the Service, which we owe to God, for he will accept the commoneſt Labour as ſuch, if it flows from that Principle. The natural Gratifications, which he hath provided for us, are neither unthankfully to be condemned, nor beyond Reaſon ſuſpected, as unſafe. And they, who run into ſuch Extremities, make Religion appear uninviting to others, and lay a heavier Burthen on themſelves, than they will be able to bear, at leaſt without ſouring their Tempers: a grievous Fault; and in that Caſe the leſs excuſable, as it is of their own bringing on, by going out of their Way: whereas going forward in it would have intitled them both to ſurer Protection and eaſier Pardon.

But ſtill over-free Indulgence is much more general, and uſually more hazardous, than overſtrict Abſtinence. And all Perſons, eſpecially all who enter far into the World, ſhould frequently and impartially examine, whether they are indeed ſo innocent, as they are apt to imagine;

imagine; whether they are not growing vain and thoughtleſs, languid in their Sentiments of true Honour and Virtue, infrequent or ſpiritleſs in their Devotions, unmindful of paſt Sins and future Improvements, forgetful of their latter End. And proportionably as they diſcover any of theſe bad Symptoms, they ſhould *take* moſt ſerious *Heed to themſelves, leſt their Hearts be overcharged with the Cares,* the Purſuits, the Diverſions, *of this Life; and ſo that Day come upon them unawares*[q].

Let us all therefore determine, neither to fly from ſuch Trials of our Virtue, as Providence hath deſigned to ſtrengthen and perfect it; nor yet run or be led into ſuch, as may probably overſet it: but uſe the Good and bear the Evil of this World with Moderation; and prepare for the Rewards of the next with Diligence.

Having thus explained the two comprehenſive Duties of Benevolence and Self-government, preſcribed in the Text, I come now to ſhew

III. That they are principal Parts of *pure and undefiled Religion.*

Indeed without them there can be nothing, that deſerves the Name. Religion is not a

[q] Luke xxi. 34.

System of speculative Opinions, nor a Ritual of Forms and Ceremonies: but it consists in that Love to God, as a Being perfectly holy in himself and good to us; and that Dutifulness to him, as the Author and Ruler of the Universe; which engage Men to seek his Favour by imitating his Nature and obeying his Laws. If then we neither become such as he is, nor do such Things as he commands, what Pretence have we to call ourselves pious Persons? "*We believe* in him." And so do *the Devils*[r]. "We *worship* him." But utterly *in vain*[s], while we continue to be, what he must for ever continue to hate; unkind to our Fellow-creatures or immoral in the Conduct of ourselves. Indeed what Desire can we have of the Reward, which he promises, heavenly Happiness; when the Temper, necessary to qualify us for enjoying it, is directly contrary to that, which we indulge? But a Person humane in his Heart, and careful in the Government of his Appetites and Passions cannot, ordinarily speaking, be *far from the Kingdom of God*[t]. He hath no worldly Motive to prejudice him against Religion: but all imaginable Reasons to hope and believe it is true. His Knowledge

[r] James ii. 19. [s] Matth. xv. 9. [t] Mark xii. 34.

of

of what is right and fit will help to give him juſt Conceptions of God: his Eſteem for it will teach him to honour God: and the Senſe, which he muſt have, of his many Failures in it, will powerfully tend to make him humble and penitent, ſollicitous for Pardon and Aſſiſtance, in what Manner ſoever beſtowed; and ambitious of that bleſſed State, where he ſhall ſin no more, but his weak Habits of Goodneſs will attain their Maturity and bring forth their Fruit in Perfection.

Thus do virtuous Diſpoſitions conduct Men to Religion: and in return, one main Buſineſs of Religion is to ſtrengthen and improve virtuous Diſpoſitions. Doubtleſs the Love of God is *the firſt and great Commandment*[u]: but the Love of our Neighbour, and of inward Holineſs, are the principal Evidences, which he requires, of our loving him[w]. Doubtleſs he is to be moſt reverently worſhipped; and every Duty, which he hath enjoined, whether by Reaſon or by Scripture alone, moſt conſcientiouſly performed: all Compariſons of one Sort with the other, which may contribute to depreciate either, muſt be carefully avoided; and the inexpreſſible good Influence of

[u] Matth. xxii. 38. [w] 1 John v. 3.

merely Chriſtian Precepts on the Obſervance of all the reſt, thankfully acknowledged. But ſtill, moral Obligations are by much the moſt numerous and extenſive: the Temptations, that we have to tranſgreſs them, are much the ſtrongeſt: the Good, which fulfilling them doth to Mankind, is much the moſt conſiderable: the Proof, which it gives, of our Advancement in Piety, is much the ſureſt. And they are completely comprehended under the two Heads, mentioned in the Text, Good-will to others, and due Regulation of ourſelves: one of which includes all the Exertions of Virtue; the other, all the Reſtraints of it.

If indeed we practiſe ever ſo many of both, only from Regard to Intereſt or Eaſe, Fondneſs for Applauſe, Fear of worldly Puniſhment or Diſeſteem; ſecuring theſe Points will be our whole Recompence. If we do it from a Senſe of Duty; that Senſe is very defective, whilſt Duty to God is left out of the Conſideration. Nay, if our principal End be Obedience to him, and we flatter ourſelves that our Obedience is meritorious or faultleſs; our Pride will convert the pretended Homage into an Inſult. But if we faithfully endeavour to perform every moral Precept, as the Law of

our

our Creator; not trusting to our own Strength, but devoutly using the appointed Means for obtaining the Aid of the holy Spirit; and then with Humility of Heart offer up to our Heavenly Father all that we do, as *our reasonable Service*[x]; but unworthy of his Acceptance, otherwise than through his Mercy, promised to the Mediation of our Blessed Lord: this will be the fullest Demonstration, and the only effectual one, that we can give of *pure Religion and undefiled.* Scripture teaches it: our Understandings acquiesce in it: the Experience of the great Day will verify it: and the Ministers of the Gospel are expresly required to publish the Notice of it beforehand. *This is a faithful Saying, and these Things I will that thou affirm constantly: that they, which have believed in God, may be careful to maintain good Works*[y].

[x] Rom. xii. 1. [y] Tit. iii. 8.

SERMON VII.

2 TIM. iii. 5.

Having a Form of Godlineſs, but denying the Power thereof: from ſuch turn away.

THESE Words conclude a moſt dreadful Deſcription given by St. *Paul* of the State of Mankind *in the laſt Days.* Having foretold the general Practice of almoſt every Sin, that could be named, he ſurpriſingly adds, that with all theſe they ſhould retain a mighty Pretence of acting from Principle: *having a Form of Godlineſs, but denying the Power thereof.* But how unaccountable ſoever this may ſeem in Speculation, it is common in Fact. And we ſhall do well to enquire, both into the Original and the Extent of ſuch Behaviour. For though Remarks have been made upon ſome Inſtances of it with ſufficient Severity, little Attention hath been paid to others of almoſt equal

equal Importance: and yet we are charged to *turn away from* all who are guilty of them, as blamable and dangerous Persons.

The Duty of Man, though proceeding all from one Source, naturally divides itself into Religion and Morals. Our Understanding and our Affections dictate to us the Practice of both these: and both evidently promote our Happiness. But they promote it by such Exercises and Restraints, as the inbred Disorder of our Frame makes uneasy, at the same Time that it makes them necessary: and that injudicious Tenderness for ourselves, to which weak Minds, as well as Bodies are liable, creates in us a strange Aversion from entering upon a Course, imagined to be still harsher than it is, though essential to our Welfare. Yet avowedly to disregard the Obligations they are under, would be too bold a Step for most Men; who must therefore find out some middle Way. And one such Way, a very obvious one, is Dissimulation: of which accordingly great Use hath been made, to preserve a Shew both of Piety and Virtue. But while just Notions of either prevail amongst Men, it will usually cost Hypocrites more Pains to gain Credit, than would be needful to become in earnest

good;

good: and after all, they but ſeldom fail of being ſeen through by others, and yet ſeldomer ſatisfy themſelves. Mere Pretence therefore will not anſwer the Purpoſe: there muſt be ſomething that hath the Look, even to our own Minds, of Reality; ſome Counterfeit of our Duty, ſubſtituted inſtead of it, which we can miſtake for it. Were ſuch Miſtakes involuntary, they would be guiltleſs: but the Perſons deceived in this Caſe, chooſe to deceive themſelves; which the vicious are both prone and able to do in a wonderful Degree. Thus the voluptuous Man takes up with preſent momentary Gratifications for his real proper Happineſs: and the artful Man looks on the Cunning, that only ſerves a ſhort-lived Turn, as genuine Wiſdom.

Now in juſt the ſame Manner Men have contrived to ſet up for Religion, ſome, one Thing, ſome another: all which, though exceeding various, go under the general Name of Superſtition. And ſeveral of theſe Corruptions might have their firſt Riſe merely from Error in Judgment or Ignorance. But then ill Deſign muſt have ſupported afterwards what otherwiſe good Senſe would eaſily have corrected: and the main Cauſe, why Men had

falſe

falſe Notions of God and his Worſhip, was, that, as the Apoſtle obſerves, *they did not like to retain* the true *in their Knowledge*[a]. It may ſeem an Objection to this, that ſuperſtitious Obſervances are often far more burthenſome, than *our reaſonable Service*[b]. But an evil Heart thinks no Grievance ſo heavy, as the Exertion of good, and the Mortification of ſinful Diſpoſitions: beſides that Ways have been invented of lightening the other Burthens, and reducing them commonly to a ſmall Matter. No Wonder then, that in all Ages *Forms of Godlineſs without the Power* took place: and being greatly diverſified, as different Occaſions invited, have not only ſtood in the Room of all that affectionate Reverence, which Men owe to God, but have often been ſuppoſed to compenſate for breaking the ſtrongeſt of thoſe Ties, which bind them one to another. And thus to their Comfort, they found themſelves at Liberty, in a great Meaſure, to be at once in Favour with Heaven, and wicked.

Yet ſtill there was remaining in their Breaſts a Senſe of Right and Wrong in their Behaviour towards their Fellow-creatures, which the groſſeſt Perverſions of Religion could not quite

[a] Rom. i. 28. [b] Rom. xii. 1.

extinguiſh;

extinguiſh; but it would from Time to Time break out, and be troubleſome. They could not therefore be completely eaſy, till this was quieted alſo: which accordingly they attempted by the ſame Method that was uſed in the former Caſe; debaſing, as there the natural Awe of God, ſo here the natural Approbation of virtuous Conduct, into a ſpurious Imitation of it. Good Minds eſteem themſelves, and labour to be eſteemed by others, for acting an innocent and uſeful, and, if need be, a ſelf-denying Part in the Community of Mankind. But bad ones, unwilling to purchaſe the Applauſe of the World and their own ſo dear, dreſs themſelves up in falſe Jewels, formed artfully to reſemble the true; are ſo dazzled and cheated with the Blaze of theſe, that they overlook the inward Deformities covered by them, and demand more Reſpect from all around them, as Perſons of Diſtinction and Merit, than the moſt truly valuable Man upon Earth doth: for he knows his Imperfections, and *who hath made him to differ*[c].

Thus then the Form without the Power, though much oftener cenſured in Religion, is perhaps as frequent, and as miſchievous in

[c] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

Morality.

Morality. Some have corrupted the former with injurious Notions of God, with abſurd Modes of honouring him, with Schemes of being pious, conſiſtent with living impiouſly. And others in like Manner have corrupted the latter with chimerical Imaginations, with pernicious Rules of Life, with vain Contrivances to be Men of Worth, notwithſtanding a Conduct in many Inſtances notoriouſly unworthy. And theſe Depravations correſpond entirely the one to the other. Only the Subſtitutes for true Religion, though widely different, are moſt, if not all of them, comprehended under the Term Superſtition; by which Name they have been plentifully expoſed: and the Subſtitutes for true Morals not having been collected into a Body, with a general Denomination affixed to them, the Abuſes introduced by their Means have eſcaped with ſlighter Notice. The moſt extenſive Word for them perhaps is, falſe Honour; which therefore, as I proceed, I ſhall commonly uſe in ſpeaking of them: yet it by no Means includes the whole; for falſe Good-nature, a different thing, is perpetually cried up, to ſerve juſt the ſame Purpoſe. But however impoſſible it may be to find an adequate Expreſſion, the Fact is clear; that Counterfeits

of

of Virtue, as well as Piety, have been ſought out, with a bad Deſign, and too ſucceſsfully.

Theſe, in ſome Breaſts, dwell together amicably: either ſo adapted to each other, as to join in approving the ſame Actions; or governing by Turns when they differ, and dividing Life between them: in which laſt Caſe, if what calls itſelf Religion chance to be offended by any enormous Piece of Iniquity, ſome Sacrifice is made to it, in Acknowledgment of its ſuperior Right; and after it is thus appeaſed, all goes on as before, through the gay and flouriſhing Part of Mens Days at leaſt. But ſome Perſons on the contrary, impatient after a while under the leaſt Reſtraints from it, throw it off entirely, and profeſs Honour alone for their Rule; on the Dignity of which valuing themſelves beyond Meaſure, they not only laugh at Superſtition with very ſuperior Airs, but depreciate all Regard to God, as no better than Superſtition. Now as it would be very unjuſt for a Man of good Morals to deſpiſe Religion; becauſe theſe two Syſtems are not only both true, but indeed the ſame Truth: ſo it is quite ridiculous for the Man of mere Honour to deſpiſe Superſtition; becauſe theſe two are not only both falſe, but in Effect the ſame Falſehood. They both proceed, as you have ſeen already,

from the ſame Unfairneſs and Inconſiderate-neſs: and if we go on to examine their Features more diſtinctly, we ſhall ſee the Nearneſs of their Relation ſtill more fully: it will appear that each depraves equally a natural and good Principle in the Heart; that in each the Depravation is brought about, by firſt exalting too highly ſome one or few Things, to the Diſparagement of others of no leſs Merit, and then carrying the favourite Point ſo far, as turns it quickly into Folly, and ſoon after into Wickedneſs; yet all under Colour of acting from the nobleſt Motives imaginable. Theſe Things I ſhall endeavour to prove and apply.

That each is the Depravation of an originally right Principle in our Hearts appears undeniably. Were not the Reverence of an inviſible Superior founded in Nature, it could neither have prevailed ſo univerſally, nor ſtood its Ground ſo firmly, againſt all the Sophiſtry, with which Unbelievers have attacked it, and under all that Load of Abſurdities, which Bigots have heaped upon it. Again: were there not ſomething eſſentially honourable and worthy, viſionary Ideas of Worth and Honour could not have obtained and ſupported themſelves amongſt Men. So that indeed the very Abuſes, which are ob-

jected

jected to Religion and Virtue, will, if duly confidered, amount to Proofs of them. *No Error can take deep Root and fpread far, without affuming a Likenefs to fome Truth, from which it feems to fpring. And the primitive Likenefs muft be a pretty ftrong one: but after a while, the Likenefs of that Likenefs may take its Place, and by Degrees all be changed into a contrary Appearance: juft as by fetching a large Compafs Perfons may feem to walk ftraight forward, till their Faces are turned the oppofite Way.

The firft Step of this Progrefs is ufually fixing the Thoughts and Affections very intenfely upon fome one Part of Duty. And this, Men argue, is being concerned for what they ought. But if this engage us too much, other Objects, intitled to our Attention, muft go without their due Share, even were we defirous they fhould have it. But if we had rather forget them, and make Amends for it by paying a double Regard to what we like better, there are no Degrees of Neglect to which we may not thus run. Every one obferves, that in Religion Men fet their whole Hearts on fome darling Speculation or Practice, and utterly overlook whatever elfe they pleafe. Now juft the fame

Thing happens in Morals; and ſeveral of the Inſtances coincide. As there are ſome, who place their religious Character in performing certain Rites, and keeping certain Rules of outward Sanctity, without the leaſt Concern about any ſuch Temper and Conduct, as thoſe Rites and Rules were deſigned to expreſs and promote: ſo do others put their moral Character, if it may be called ſuch, on little external Proprieties and Decencies of Behaviour, which they would on no Account violate, yet have no Scruple of trampling upon the moſt important ſocial Obligations; will be guilty of the greateſt Injuſtice, but not for the World commit an Incivility; and while in ſome Caſes they moſt rigidly obſerve the niceſt Punctilios, will in others diſguiſe the vileſt Perfidiouſneſs with the meaneſt Hypocriſy. Again: the whole Piety of many lies in a vehement Zeal to have ſuch Things publickly profeſſed, as either they do not believe, or at leaſt will not practiſe: and the whole Virtue of others conſiſts in extravagant Talk, meant to propagate high Notions of Rectitude and intellectual Beauty, and harmonious Affections, which have ſcarce the leaſt Influence on them beyond Words. Again: ſome have narrowed their Chriſtian Charity almoſt into the ſingle Act of Almſgiving to the Poor,

Poor, on the Strength of which they will venture, not only to be uncharitable in many Ways to whomſoever elſe they will, but poſſibly diſhoneſt, intemperate, diſſolute beſides. And others have ſhrunk their boaſted Benevolence into a partial Good-nature, arbitrarily exerted or with-held, and ſhewn chiefly perhaps on Occaſions very ill choſen; from which they claim Allowance to be as inhumanly barbarous in other Caſes as they pleaſe, and as profane and debauched as they can. In ſhort, Men turn their Pretences to Morals into almoſt nothing, juſt as they do their Pretences to Religion: and in both they proceed, ſometimes by Faſhion and Cuſtom, ſometimes by mere Inclination or Humour. To ſome Things they adhere firmly without any Reaſon, others they ſlight contemptuouſly, though grounded on the ſtrongeſt Reaſons. And thus, on both Sides, Attachment to Truth and Duty is gradually effaced: till, as the one Sort can be very pious with as little true Religion, as they think proper; ſo the other can be Perſons of Honour, with a very ſmall Share of any ſingle good Quality. Indeed it is pitiable to ſee what wretched poor Remnants of Principle ſuch Men have at laſt to pride themſelves upon, and dignify with pompous Names.

Nor do both ſorts agree only in this firſt Step, of exalting ſome favourite Article to the undue Depreſſion of others, but in the ſecond, of carrying it to ſuch Lengths, as turn it into Folly, and afterwards into Wickedneſs.

For as Superſtition preſſes the Obligation of many Things further than Religion requires; ſo doth falſe Honour, beyond the Precepts of Morality: and ſtrange Refinements are adopted, by the one in the Service of God, and by the other in the Intercourſes of common Life, which neither divine nor human Wiſdom can poſſibly approve. But further: as Superſtition ſometimes obliges Men to tranſgreſs the Rules of Virtue; ſo doth falſe Honour very frequently oblige them to tranſgreſs the Rules of Religion. And indeed the ſuperſtitious Man, to do him Juſtice, though he is very apt to look down upon Morality as a low Attainment, yet in general doth think it one of ſome Value: but the mere Man of Honour takes Religion to be downright Meanneſs; and at the ſame Time that he will pay the moſt ſervile Court to an earthly Superior, thinks all Expreſſions of Duty to the Lord and King of Heaven and Earth much beneath him: or though inwardly he thinks otherwiſe, yet the cowardly Fear of making an ill

Figure

Figure amongst his Brethren drives him to the absurd Bravery of daring to affront God, though it be with a guilty Conscience, and an aching Heart. Further: as the superstitious Man holds those in Contempt who observe only the common Rules of Piety; so doth the Man of false Honour those who confine themselves to the common Rules of Virtue. And as the Extravagances of the one make Religion despised, and tempt Men to run into Profaneness; so do the Wildnesses of the other make Virtue laughed at, and tempt Men to run into Profligacy. If Superstition contradicts, and then to screen itself, undervalues Reason: still the fiercest Bigot, or most frantic Enthusiast, cannot have less Regard to Reason, or more absolutely refuse to be tried by it, than the Man of false Honour. Nor can the former pay a more irrational Worship to his Deity, than the other pays, and requires that every Body else should pay, to himself. Further yet: Men of Religion and Virtue are humble and diffident, candid and mild: but Devotees to the Shadow of each, are always haughty and positive, suspicious and ready to take Offence. And when they do take Offence, the hottest Zealot cannot easily be more mischievous in God's Cause,

than the Man of Honour thinks himſelf bound to be in his own. If the Religion, that torments and ſheds Blood to propagate Faith, be cruel and deteſtable; the Honour, that ravages and depopulates Nations to extend Glory, deſerves no ſofter Epithets. If Superſtition, on ſmall Pretences, enliſts Men into Parties, bitter againſt one another, and hurtful to Society; falſe Honour, on Grounds as inconſiderable, raiſes Factions equally pernicious; and exacts the ſame Perſeverance in adhering to, and going every Length with, the Side once choſen, whatever Riſque the whole may run by it. If Superſtition in ſome Caſes teaches Men to ſtick at no Wickedneſs, under Penalty of loſing God's Favour; ſo doth falſe Honour in others, under that of forfeiting the Eſteem of what is called the World. And if the former gives Men Hopes of eſcaping the Anger of Heaven for many known Sins by Zeal for ſome imagined Duty; the latter helps them to evade the Condemnation of their own Hearts for many baſe Actions, by encouraging them to pique themſelves on ſome one Point of Merit, which perhaps after all hath little or no Merit in it. And thus, as, under the Influence of Superſtition, all Senſe of true Religion fades away; ſo doth all Senſe of

true Virtue under that of meer Honour: till at laſt the Meaning of this big Word is become ſo little that a Man ſhall claim, and be allowed, a Title to it, with ever ſo few good Qualities, and ever ſo many bad ones; provided he dares but venture his Life to be revenged of thoſe who ſhall aſcribe to him any of the latter Sort, which he doth not care to acknowledge.

The vileſt Superſtition cannot poſſibly have depraved the Heart more, than ſuch Honour: nor uſually are its ill Impreſſions ſo hard to change for better. And therefore though a State of corrupt Religion be doubtleſs a deplorable one; yet that is ſtill worſe, and more immediately bordering upon Ruin, when all Reverence for God being avowedly renounced, and all Concern for Virtue in Reality extinguiſhed, the ſingle Direction left for human Behaviour, the only Principle profeſſed to keep Men from being abandoned throughout, is an airy Notion, which will eaſily aſſume any Shape to ſerve any Purpoſe, that they pleaſe; or vaniſh at Command, when it can ſerve none. It ſhould be added, that as Superſtition is a much wickeder Thing, for corrupting Religion under Pretence of highly reſpecting it; ſo is falſe Honour, for corrupting Morals under the Colour of refining and

exalting them. And the latter Corruptions are the leſs excuſable of the two, as they can hardly in ſo great a Degree proceed from Miſtake: ſince the Duties, that we owe one to another muſt be conſiderably more obvious to our Apprehenſions, than ſuch as flow from the Relations in which we ſtand to our heavenly Father, his Son and holy Spirit.

Upon the whole, I hope it is evident, that theſe two Characters are in many Particulars directly alike: that where they are oppoſite, they have this Likeneſs ſtill, that one is as far removed from Truth as the other: but that in the Point before us they perpetually agree: that is, in being ſpecious *Forms* and Appearances of the two moſt valuable Things in the World, without having *the Power* and Subſtance of either; in obſcuring by this fallacious Reſemblance that Knowledge of their Duty, which by Reaſon and Revelation God hath given to Men, and making *the Light that is in them Darkneſs*[d].

Yet, notwithſtanding all that hath been ſaid, I muſt beg you to obſerve, that both Superſtition may be ſo ſpoken againſt as to depreciate Piety; and Honour ſo as to depreciate Virtue. What many delight to repeat, as a Maxim with-

[d] Matt. vi. 23.

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out Exception, that Superſtition is worſe than having no Religion at all, may be true in ſome Caſes: juſt as it may in others, that falſe Honour is worſe than having no Rule of Conduct. But ſince either of theſe may prevail in a very ſmall and nearly harmleſs Degree, or in a great and pernicious one; to conclude the higheſt and the loweſt under the ſame Condemnation, and make him who doth no worſe than load the Foundation of Truth with a few ungraceful Superſtructures, equally guilty with ſuch as would overturn it, is either the groſſeſt Unfairneſs, or the moſt pitiable Want of Judgment. Religion and Virtue naturally produce the happieſt Effects. Erroneous Notions in either tend, always to weaken thoſe Effects, often to produce the contrary: and therefore it ſhould be, the conſtant Buſineſs of wiſe and good Men to weed them out of human Minds; but with the utmoſt Caution; *leſt while the Tares are gathered, the Wheat alſo be rooted up with them*[e]. And they, who manifeſt no Feeling of this Danger, have either a worſe Intention than they own, or a Zeal guided by very little Prudence.

Therefore the Uſe to be made of this Diſcourſe is, not that the Enormities of ſuper-

[e] Matth. xiii. 29.

ſtitious

ſtitious Men ſhould bring Piety into Diſgrace, or thoſe of the Votaries of falſe Honour make true Honour deemed a Phantom; not that either of theſe defective and faulty Characters ſhould keep themſelves in Countenance by inveighing againſt the Defects and Faults of the other; but that both labour ſeriouſly to ſupply and correct their own, and ſo become ſuch in Deed, as they are now only in Imagination. For if our Maker demand any Obedience from his rational Creatures, it muſt be paid to his whole Will, however made known: and if we are under any Ties of ſocial Behaviour or Self-government, we are bound to whatever is juſt and fit. All genuine Religion leads to Virtue: all genuine Virtue to Religion: *What therefore God hath joined together, let no Man put aſunder*[f]: but let all unite in the Practice of both, as preſcribed in the Goſpel. For there and there only they will find, (what ſtrongly demonſtrates its heavenly Origin) a blameleſs and perfect Inſtitution of Duty, without any Mixture of what is wrong, or any Omiſſion of what is right. *Thanks be unto God for his unſpeakable Gift*[g].

[f] Matth. xix. 6. Mark x. 9.
[g] 2 Cor. ix. 15.

SERMON VIII.

GAL. iv. 4.

When the Fulneſs of the Time was come, God ſent forth his Son.

THE Redemption of Mankind from Sin and Miſery by the Incarnation and Death of Chriſt was, on God's Part, entirely a Matter of mere Grace and Favour. It depended wholly on his free Choice, whether he would ſend a Saviour into the World at all: much more at what Time he would do it. We have therefore no Claim, but what is founded on his voluntary Promiſes. Theſe indeed, when they were given, he was bound to make good. And as ſome of them not only aſſured the World of ſuch a Perſon's coming, but fixed the Time of it; ſo accordingly he came at the Time fixed. It hath been foretold

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in Scripture, that he ſhould appear under the fourth of the great Empires of the World[a]; whilſt the ſecond Houſe, or Temple of the *Jews*, was in being[b]; when *the Sceptre was departing from Judah*[c]; at the End of ſo many Weeks after their Return from the Captivity[d], each conſiſting, not of ſeven Days, but of ſeven Years. And in Fact, juſt when all theſe Marks were viſibly united, *Jeſus came into Galilee, preaching and ſaying, The Time is fulfilled; and the Kingdom of God is at hand: Repent ye, and believe the Goſpel*[e].

The Fulneſs of Time therefore, mentioned by the Apoſtle in the Text, which he calls *the appointed Time of the Father* two Verſes before, is plainly that which the Scripture-prophecies point out and determine. And this being kept to, as it was with great Exactneſs; reaſonable and conſiderate Men, if the World were made up of ſuch only, would have little farther left to do in the Matter, than to acknowledge, with due Admiration, that *known unto God are all his Works from the Beginning*[f]. Still, modeſt Inquiries may undoubtedly be made, why a Bleſſing of ſo great Importance was delayed ſo long? If Reaſons can be found, pious Minds

[a] Dan. ii. 44. [b] Hag. ii. 9. [c] Gen. xlix. 10.
[d] Dan. ix. 25, 26. [e] Mark i. 14, 15. [f] Acts xv. 18.

will

will rejoice in them: if not, they will eaſily be ſatisfied, that God can ſee better and farther, than his Creatures.

[g] But the captious and the arrogant, they who muſt either underſtand every Thing, or will believe nothing, have, it ſeems, inſuperable Difficulties on this Head: and the one Point of our Saviour's coming no ſooner, is enough with them to deſtroy his whole Claim without looking farther into it. For they ſay, if either his Inſtructions or his Death, were of ſuch Conſequence, as Chriſtians imagine; why was not the World bleſſed with them immediately? Where was the Goodneſs, where was the Wiſdom, of deferring till 1700 Years ago, what, if it was neceſſary at all, was equally neceſſary long before. If their own Reaſon was a ſufficient Guide to Men, there was no Need of his ever coming to teach them: if it was not, he

[g] *Celſ.* in *Orig.* l. 6. §. 78. objects: Why ſo late? Why into ſuch a Corner? He ſhould have animated many Bodies and been ſent into different Parts of the World. *Origen* anſwers, that he entered before his Incarnation into all that lived well: that he muſt appear in a Nation owning one God, and having Prophecies of his Coming, and at a Time when his Doctrine could ſpread*: that one Chriſt, as one Sun, was enough for the World; and if not, all Chriſtians are Members of his Body.

* On which Point alſo he inſiſts, l. 2. §. 30. ſhewing the Advantage of his appearing when the World was in Peace, under one great Empire.

ought

ought to have ſupplied the Defects of it many Ages ſooner.

Now to theſe Objections it would be Anſwer enough, that God having borne Teſtimony to Chriſtianity, firſt by Prophecies evidently fulfilled, then by Miracles unqueſtionably performed; it is a much more concluſive Argument, that for theſe Reaſons, it certainly came from him, and therefore came at a proper Time; than that, according to our Notions, it did not come at a proper Time, and therefore did not come from him. Of plain Facts well atteſted, and plain Concluſions drawn from them, we are competent Judges. But for Creatures who have only a very imperfect Acquaintance with a very ſmall Part of the World, for a very few Years, to think of preſcribing, by what Steps the allwiſe God muſt conduct the Affairs of it; and at what Period he is bound to do this Thing and that, if he doth it at all; is ſuch amazing Preſumption, as no Degree of ignorant Boldneſs in deciding about the higheſt Points of earthly Knowledge, makes any Approach to: and were it carried on to its full Length, it muſt end in downright Atheiſm.

For ſuppoſe a new Set of Objectors ſhould ariſe, and argue againſt the Creation, as theſe

do againſt the Redemption, of Man: ſhould aſk, if a good and wiſe Being made the World for our Happineſs, why he made it no ſooner; why he did not make us at once as happy, as we could be; why at leaſt the Conveniencies of Life, the Remedies for Diſeaſes, the ſeveral Parts of uſeful and entertaining Knowledge were not diſcovered to us immediately; why the extraordinary Perſons, who in various Ways have enlightened and benefited the World, were ſent into it ſo late, and not at the very firſt; where was the Goodneſs, where was the Wiſdom, of deferring ſo many Things till theſe later Ages; which, if they were wanted at all, were equally wanted long before? Could any other Anſwer be given in Defence of natural Religion, than hath been given juſt now in Defence of the Goſpel; that God knows beſt the proper Time of every Thing. Let theſe Objectors therefore chuſe, whether they will ſtand by their Objection, and be Atheiſts; or give it up, and be Chriſtians.

But to ſupply them with ſome Inducements to chuſe right, and give you ſome further Satiſfaction in ſo material a Point, it will be uſeful to conſider our bleſſed Lord's Coming,

I. With Regard to thoſe who lived before it; and

II. With

II. With Relation to those who lived after it. For thence it will appear, that his Coming, when he did; was no Hardship to the former; and an unspeakable Advantage to the latter: and therefore was well and wisely appointed.

I. That his Coming, when he did, was no Hardship to those, who lived before it. For though his personal Appearance was late, yet that doth not hinder, but the earliest Ages may have been greatly the happier for it: We learn indeed from Scripture, that *there is no Salvation in any other*[h]. But we learn also, that the Salvation, procured by him, extends from the Beginning of Time to the End of it: that *as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*[i]: that good Persons in the first Ages, as well as in the following, were redeemed by his Blood, who being foreordained from Eternity, to be *manifested in due Time*[k], is therefore, in Respect of the Efficacy of his Death, *the Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World*[l]. The Reality of this Efficacy we hope we are well able to defend, whenever that shall be the Point in Question. But in the mean Time this is very evident, that whatever Motive the View of his

[h] Acts iv. 12. [i] 1 Cor. xv. 22. [k] Tit. i. 2, 3. [l] Rev. xiii. 8.

Sufferings,

Sufferings, when paſt, could offer to God for being gracious to Men, the Foreſight of the ſame Sufferings, covenanted for in Time to come, muſt be an equal Motive: for a good Security is, to all Intents, equivalent to an actual Payment. And therefore the Death of our Saviour, when he did die, was juſt as beneficial, as it poſſibly could have been, ever ſo much earlier. And as we firmly believe that it was highly beneficial to many, who truſted in God's Mercy, with a very obſcure Knowledge of him: ſo we are far from denying, that it may have been beneficial to many others, who truſted in the ſame Mercy, without any preſent Knowledge of him at all.

We do indeed maintain, that human Reaſon, unaſſiſted by divine Revelation, is an inſufficient Guide in Matters of Religion. But inſufficient for what Purpoſe? Not inſufficient to ſhew the Means of eſcaping future Miſery. If it were, ſince Multitudes have never had any other Guide, they muſt be miſerable unavoidably, and God unjuſt in making them ſo. But we ſay it is inſufficient, in its very Nature, to give Men that Degree of Knowledge and Goodneſs, and conſequently that future Happineſs, which the Faith of Chriſt can give:

 and

and that it hath proved insufficient in Fact, to give any one Nation in the World any considerable Degree of Knowledge and Goodness at all: nay, to preserve any one Nation from being overwhelmed with gross Ignorance and Wickedness. That the heathen Part of the World hath been thus ignorant and wicked, Unbelievers themselves must acknowledge. And if it be an Argument against the Christian Scheme, that nothing was done sooner to relieve them: how much stronger an Argument is it against *their* Scheme, that, according to that, nothing is yet, or ever will be, done to relieve them? We teach, that God sent his Son to reform the World, when he saw it a proper Time: they teach, that he hath sent no one at any Time: and which bears hardest upon his Goodness and Wisdom? Undoubtedly they will say, that God makes due Allowances for the Disadvantages Men are under. Why we say the very same Thing: and why is not the Plea as good in our Mouths, as in theirs? Much better indeed: because we think unassisted Reason could hardly, if at all, teach Men, several Truths, which they think it could not fail to teach them: and therefore, as unaffected Ignorance is always an Excuse for

Faults,

Faults, Unbelievers, if they will be confiſtent with themſelves, muſt paſs a harder Sentence on the Heathen World, than Chriſtians have Ground to do.

But not only the Generality of the World, before Chriſt, were poſſeſſed of this Advantage on our Scheme; but a conſiderable Part of it enjoyed, what might have been, if they would, a much greater; and as they wanted ſupernatural Inſtruction, ſo they had it. Revelations were made, as ſoon as ever they became needful, firſt to *Adam*, then to *Noah*, then to *Abraham*: each of whom doubtleſs communicated them to their Deſcendants. Now the Deſcendants of the two former were all Mankind; and of the laſt, ſeveral great Nations. Then afterwards, that aſtoniſhing Delivery of the Law on Mount *Sinai* to the *Jews*, preceded by ſuch Miracles in *Egypt*, followed by ſo many more in *Canaan*, and made the Foundation of a large Commonwealth, profeſſing Faith in one only God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, was a ſtanding Declaration of true Religion, firſt to all the Countries in their Neighbourhood, then to all the Countries in which they were Captives or diſperſed, till the very Time of our Saviour's Appearance. The

Effects of these Things, though much less than they might have been, were however considerable; perhaps the chief Foundation of all the true Religion which the Gentiles had. And how much less worthy of the divine Goodness is the Doctrine of Unbelievers, that Man was totally abandoned by his Maker to Ignorance and Sin; than ours, that Interpositions from above in his Favour were thus often vouchsafed? And how greatly do these lessen the Difficulty, concerning our Saviour's Coming so late; especially if we add farther, what the Word of God much more than intimates, that all the supernatural Instructions which the World had from the earliest Times, were given for his Sake, and through his Means. Nay, were we to say farther yet, that he gave personally the chief of them; and appeared many Times for this Purpose, before he appeared in the Flesh: it would be nothing more, than Scripture makes probable, and learned and judicious Christians in all Ages have believed.

Since therefore the World had no Right at all to any Revelation of God's Will, and yet partook of it thus from the first; they were by no Means hardly treated, in not having the fullest Manifestation of it sooner. Nay, indeed,

deed, there must be something peculiarly pleasing to good Men amongst the *Jews*, in that gradual Increase of Light, which was imparted to them, brightening on continually towards perfect Day. And every pious Mind, in every Place, had one Advantage, even from the Obscurity which encompassed them; that they could exercise a more acceptable Trust in the divine Promises, while they were less explicit: and intitle themselves to a greater Blessedness, for doing so much, while they saw in Comparison so little.

Still we own, that, upon the whole, they had not equal Privileges with us; and yet we hold *that God is no Respecter of Persons*[m]: that is, he never makes unjust or unreasonable Distinctions: but that he makes very often such as we cannot see the Reason for, is as evident in the daily Course of Nature and Providence, as in the Doctrine of Revelation. It is most visible, that God withholds many Blessings, conducive to Virtue and Piety, as well as to temporal Happiness, from some Persons, some Nations, and some Ages, which yet he bestows on others: and why then might he not withhold, from the Ages before Christ, the Advantages,

[m] Acts x. 34.

tages, which thoſe after him receive from his Coming, even though we could not ſhew, what End was anſwered by that Method of proceeding? But indeed we can ſhew many valuable ones: as I ſhall now proceed to do, under the

IId Head propoſed, which is: That his appearing ſo late, as it was no Injury to the preceding Times, was a great Benefit to the following. For by that Means, Chriſtianity was capable, both of being proved more clearly, and ſpread through the World more eaſily, and fixed in it more laſtingly.

Had our Saviour appeared in the early Ages, there had been little or no Room for a Number of Prophecies concerning him beforehand. Or if there had, it would have been difficult, if not impoſſible, to prove afterwards, that ſuch Prophecies were made a ſufficient Time before the Event. And thus one Kind of Evidence of his Authority, and a very ſtrong one muſt have been intirely loſt.

And for the other Evidence, that of Miracles: had Chriſt come and performed his, only a thouſand or two of Years earlier than he did; they who object now to his Coming no ſooner, how much more would they have objected in that

that Caſe to his Coming ſo ſoon; in a Period of Time, when Men were ignorant and unexperienced, credulous and unſuſpicious, and beſides incapable of conveying down to us with any Certainty what paſſed amongſt them? Indeed as it is, are not ſome ready to ſay or imagine, though very unjuſtly, that the Credit of the Goſpel Hiſtory is leſs for its being ſo ancient; and wearing out continually, as Time runs on? What would they have ſaid then, if the Time had been twice as long? Very poſſibly, there might have been little Need for them to ſay any Thing: almoſt, if not quite, every Ray of Truth might have been loſt in the Thickneſs of the Medium, through which it was to paſs; and at beſt the Son of God might have appeared no otherwiſe, than as one of the fabulous Heroes of Pagan Antiquity. Now indeed, having a Series of Revelations down to his Days, the latter Part atteſting and confirming the former, we have ſufficient Ground to rely firmly on the earlieſt. But had the whole been cloſed when the firſt was given, the Proof of it muſt have been much weaker.

Nay, had he come in the Mid-way, between thoſe Times, and that when he did; in what

State would he have found the World? He would have found the *Jews*, far from being capable of so spiritual a Religion as his, not sufficiently restrained by all the Fetters, and all the Pomp, of their own ceremonial one, from gross Idolatry; and therefore plainly, as the Apostle observes, in the Condition of *Children*, wanting to be kept longer *under Tutors and Governors, and the Elements* of their Law, till they should come to be of Age for a State of Freedom [n]. Besides, they were hitherto little known in the World; and as Christianity, for many Reasons, was to have its Rise in that Nation, the proper Time for its Rise was certainly, not till their Testimony to the Prophecies and Facts on which it was built, could reach farther, and have more Effect.

Then as to the Gentiles, the Darkness they were in, till a small Time before our Saviour's Appearance, was much too great for them to bear the Light of the Sun, breaking out upon them at once. Or had it not, they were divided into Numbers of small Kingdoms and States, continually at War. The Communication of a Religion, from one to another of these, would have been extremely difficult:

[n] Gal. iv. 1, 2, 3.

and

and neither Miracles, nor Inſtructions, could eaſily have reached far. Jealouſies would have ariſen, that political Purpoſes of one againſt another were deſigned to be ſerved by it: ſome ſuch perhaps would have been grafted upon it. One Nation would have favoured and eſtabliſhed the new Scheme; another rejected and calumniated it: and by theſe Conteſts every Part of its Evidence, and eſpecially that great one, the Diſintereſtedneſs of its Teachers, would have become ſo doubtful, that many conſiderate Men would ſcarce have known what to think of it.

Beſides, had our bleſſed Lord's Inſtructions been given much earlier; After-times would never have known ſufficiently the Need they had of them: but would have imagined, that, in a little while, Men would have found out of themſelves, every Thing which he had taught them. Even now, after the Experience of ſo many Ages to the contrary, ſome tell us, that the whole of Religion, of all we have to believe and do, to hope or fear, is ſo plain, that no one could ever miſs it. How much more plauſibly then would they have ſaid ſo, and indeed how much fainter a Senſe ſhould we all have had of our Obligations to Chriſt; if the

moſt

moſt enlightened Parts of the World, had not, before his Coming, wandered ſo long in Superſtition and Sin?

Nor is this farther Conſideration without its Weight: that, had our Saviour come and delivered the Precepts of Chriſtianity in their full Purity and Strictneſs, before the Light of Nature had been ſufficiently improved, by a few of the Heathens, to diſcern and own the Juſtneſs of them; what is ſtill ſaid by ſome, would then have been ſaid by many more: that they were utterly too rigid for the Nature and Circumſtances of Man; and unfit to be required of ſuch Creatures, as we are.

But now, inſtead of all theſe Inconveniences, the oppoſite Advantages are happily obtained, only by waiting, till *the Fulneſs of Time was come*. By this prudent Delay, the *Jews* were ſo far prepared for his Reception, as they were reclaimed from Idolatry: and therefore the *Moſaick* Law, which had been made to keep them from it, might be ſafely laid aſide. Some of them were grown ſuperſtitiouſly fond of the legal Ceremonies: theſe it was Time to enlighten. Others were longing for that better State of Things, which the Prophets had foretold: theſe it was Time to bleſs with the Con-

Consolation they waited for. The Expectation, which they both had of the Messiah, would excite a great Attention to the holy Jesus: and yet the too common Opinion, that he was to appear as a temporal Prince, would sufficiently keep them from being partial in his Favour, since he appeared in a Manner so different. Their Government was still in Being, and their Laws in Use, for those, who would, to examine into: their Countrymen were spread through a great Part of the Earth, to make the Examination easier: their sacred Books had been some Time before translated into *Greek*, the commonest Language then in the World, for every one's Perusal. By these Means, they and their Religion were well enough known, easily to afford all needful Information; yet by no Means well enough liked, to prejudice Men in favour of any new Doctrine, that should proceed from them. Nor could Men be prejudiced through them, on the Side of Christianity: for though they bore a considerable Testimony to it, yet most Part of them did it against their Wills; since, though many of them believed in Christ, the Generality did not.

This

This Condition of the *Jews* undoubtedly made the *Gentiles* much better Judges, of our Saviour's Claim, than they could have been, had he appeared before. And as to their own Condition; Learning and Philosophy had flourished amongst them for some Ages; but was then become more universal, than ever. It had freed the Minds of many from the established Superstitions. It had taught a few the Reasonableness of some of the strictest Precepts, which our Saviour afterwards delivered. And in these Respects it had very happily made Way for his Doctrine. But it had been far from accomplishing any general Reformation, even of Opinions, in the World. The Heathen Morality was founded on Speculation, too abstracted for the Bulk of Mankind; was fitted rather to confound them by endless Disputes, than teach them any Thing solid to rest upon: indeed, to say the Truth, it was never proposed to them or taught them publickly, but confined to the Schools of Philosophers. Nay, it had not convinced even them of many most important Truths; or of the Duty of professing honestly the important Truths, of which they *were* convinced: for they all conformed to the established Idolatries.

Now

Now theſe Things plainly ſhewed, that Reaſon alone would never make known ſo much of Religion, as Men had Need to know; and therefore Revelation was infinitely deſirable. Yet at the ſame Time, no Age before had ever been ſo unlikely to embrace a falſe Revelation, as that was. The Improvement of Knowledge had throughly enabled them to diſtinguiſh between Truth and Impoſture: the many Cheats of Paganiſm had put them on their Guard: the prevailing Sect of the Times was the *Epicurean*, which believed nothing of Religion. And even the prevailing Wickedneſs of the Times would be ſure to keep Men from admitting, too haſtily, a Religion, ſo ſtrictly virtuous, as the Chriſtian; and indeed, to diſcourage any, that were cunning enough to be Deceivers, from ever hoping to impoſe by Artifice and Fraud ſuch a Set of Precepts on ſuch an Age. Had it been one of as great Simplicity of Manners, as ſome of the foregoing; it might have been pretended, that the Goodneſs of the Morality of the Goſpel had made its other Doctrines paſs without Evidence. But to require of a Generation, ſo extremely vicious, what had never been required of Man before, an abſolute Denial of

every

every wrong Inclination of every Kind, was a full Proof of Honesty in the Teachers: and, if they prevailed, a strong Presumption of the Truth of what they taught. Now we know they did prevail. And as, without the least Learning, they delivered a sublimer and purer Religion; so, without the least worldly Help, they produced, in a few Years, a greater Reformation, than all the Wit and Power of Man had ever been able to do before: of both which Arguments Christianity must have been deprived, had God revealed it, before Philosophy and human Policy, had tried their own Strength.

But further yet, when our Saviour appeared, and scarce till then, the greatest Part of the known World was peaceably settled under one Empire, that of the *Romans*. On which Account, Men were much more at Leisure for attending to a new Religion: travelling and sending Intelligence was much more commodious: Christianity therefore was easily propagated; and its Proofs as easily examined. Besides this, its being persecuted so soon, and so long, through the whole of that vast Dominion, shewed its Professors to have no worldly Interest in View: which they possibly might, if

if the ſame Extent of Country had ſtill been divided amongſt different Princes; one of whom perhaps would have protected them againſt another. And their getting the better, by mere Argument and Patience, of this moſt formidable Power, was a ſtrong Proof, that Truth, and the God of Truth, was their Support. To which it muſt be added, that the Scene of this noble Struggle being at the ſame Time the Seat of Learning, we have a ſufficient Account of it handed down to us from the firſt, both by Friends and Enemies: whereas in the more ignorant Countries, where Chriſtianity was taught, (and the Obſervation is greatly to its Honour) it either could not get Footing, or could not keep it; and where it laſted longeſt, little or no Hiſtory of it remains.

Theſe Advantages then our Religion had, from not being publiſhed till the Age, in which it was. If any former might poſſibly be as proper in ſome Reſpects, yet none will be found ſo proper in all. And if what hath been ſaid hath only Weight enough to remove an Objection againſt the Goſpel, no more is neceſſary. But I hope it will be thought a powerful Circumſtance in its Favour, that the Time of its Promulgation was ſo evidently the right one.

And

And I hope alſo, that conſiderate Men will take Occaſion from this Inſtance to reflect, that in others too the Ways of God may be very juſt and wiſe, where perhaps, on a haſty View, they may ſeem very exceptionable.

But I muſt not conclude without adding, that the Care, with which our Saviour choſe for our Sakes the fitteſt Seaſon of coming, ſhould make us very careful for our own Sakes to be fit for receiving him. The whole Benefit to us of what he did then, depends intirely on what we ſhall do at preſent: and all he hath gone through to help and ſave us, will only increaſe our Miſery, if we neglect to help ourſelves, by performing, (through the Means which he hath procured for us) all the Duties of a godly, righteous and ſober Life, in the conſtant Expectation of his Coming again. Permit me therefore to conclude in the Apoſtle's Words. *We then, as Workers together with him, beſeech you, that ye receive not the Grace of God in vain. For he ſaith, I have heard thee in a Time accepted, and in the Day of Salvation have I ſuccoured thee: behold, now is the accepted Time; behold, now is the Day of Salvation* [o].

[o] 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2.

SER-

SERMON IX.

JOHN xx. 29.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they, that have not seen, and yet have believed.

THESE Words relate to the strange Unwillingness of one of the Apostles to admit the Testimony of our Saviour's Resurrection. And there is something so remarkable and instructive in the Account, which the Evangelists give, not only of the Behaviour of St. *Thomas* in the single Instance before us, but of the whole Behaviour of the various Persons concerned in the History of our blessed Lord, and especially in the concluding Part of it, that I shall desire your Attention a while to that Matter in general before I proceed to our Apostle's Case in particular.

Throughout the Gofpels, the Characters of all who appear in them, though very unlike each to the other, and fome of them very uncommon, are drawn fo agreeably to Nature, and prefented fo confiftent; (while yet the Writers plainly ufed no Art on the Occafion, and indeed were incapable of ufing it to any Purpofe) that a confiderate Perfon, without farther Evidence, muft conceive the Defcriptions to be taken from the Life. Supernatural Things indeed, of the moft amazing Kind, are intermixed. But then the Caufe was worthy of them in the higheft Degree: and all the mere human Part of the Narration, if I may call it by that Name, is fo intirely free from any Thing forced and romantic, and reprefents the Heads and Hearts of Men working fo exactly as they do in Fact work, yet fo differently from what the unfkilful would be apt to expect from them, that it very ftrongly confirms the Truth of all that is related. I fhall fpecify only fuch Proofs of this Point, as occur in the fhort Story of our Saviour's Death and Return to Life.

The Picture, which we have there, of the Bigotry and Superftition of the Jews, how aftonifhing is it, and yet how juft! Zealous Profeffors of a Religion which prefers Juftice

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and Mercy to all Things; yet incited by that very Zeal to the groſſeſt Violations of both: abhorring from Principle the *Roman* Power; yet making it in Form their Charge againſt the meek and lowly Jeſus, that he was dangerous to that Power: determined to have his Life, though viſibly innocent; ſuborning falſe Witneſſes; raiſing Tumults for that wicked End; yet much too ſcrupulous to go into the Judgment-hall, leſt they ſhould be defiled, and made unfit to eat the Paſſover. At the ſame Time, *Pilate*, the *Roman* Governor, appears in quite another Light: a perfectly natural one indeed for a Man of the World; but which plain Country People, and ſuch the firſt Believers were, would never have placed him in, from their own Invention. Contemptuouſly indifferent about the religious Accuſations brought againſt the Priſoner: very clear, that the political ones were groundleſs, and therefore in Earneſt deſirous to ſave him: but however, making a Compliment of him at all Adventures to *Herod*, the Moment that he had Hopes it might reconcile, as it did, a powerful Enemy; and ready without Heſitation to crucify him, rather than run the Hazard of not being thought *Cæſar*'s Friend. His Wife in the mean while, with the native Tenderneſs of her

Sex, and the common Superſtition of the Age, lays a Streſs on her very Dreams to diſſuade him from ſhedding guiltleſs Blood.

The Diſciples, on this trying Incident, we find repreſented to be of juſt ſuch various and unequal Characters, as Men generally are indeed, but are ſeldom made to be in fictitious Compoſitions. *Judas*, whom Chriſt, though he knew him well, permitted to be an Apoſtle, (probably to ſhew, that the worſt of Men, with the faireſt Opportunities, could prove no Evil againſt him) after following him to make a Profit of keeping the Purſe, firſt betrays him for a little more Profit; yet, like a true Villain, aims to conceal his Treachery under Marks of moſt affectionate Regard: is ſtruck however with Remorſe and Horror, when he begins to ſee the Conſequences of his Crime draw nearer; but deſtroys himſelf, inſtead of aſking Pardon, becauſe his own Heart was too bad, to be capable of believing that his Lord could forgive him. *Peter*, on the contrary, whoſe Forwardneſs and Self-opinion had led him unneceſſarily into the Neighbourhood of Danger, unable to go through the Trial, which he had choſen, ſinks into very wrong Behaviour for a while: but having fallen merely through Weakneſs, is recovered by a Look

Look of the Perſon, whom he had ſo meanly diſowned, and gives immediate Proofs of the moſt ingenuous Repentance. *John*, the beloved Diſciple, though driven away with the reſt, (and no Wonder) by their common Fears, yet cannot ſtay with them; goes back, the ſame Hour, to his Maſter at the Palace of the High Prieſt; ſtands by his Croſs the next Day, receives his dying Commands, and takes his Mother directly Home to his own Houſe.

The Soldiers alſo, and the Multitude, are deſcribed with the ſame Juſtneſs and Propriety. Inſolent and ludicrous beyond Meaſure at firſt, and for ſome Time; but gradually ſoftened, and compoſed into Serioufneſs, the more they ſaw: till at length even the Heathen Centurion, who preſided over the Execution, *glorified God, ſaying, Certainly this was a righteous Man; truly this was the Son of God: and all the People, that came together to that Sight, beholding the Things which were done, ſmote their Breaſts, and returned*[a]. But let us proceed with the Diſciples.

After his Death, we find them all abſolutely hopeleſs about his Reſurrection: a Circumſtance which undoubtedly adds much Weight

[a] Matt. xxvii. 54. Mark xv. 39. Luke xxiii. 47, 48.

to their ſubſequent Conviction of it; but which no Impoſtor would ever have invented, becauſe it appears ſo hard to reconcile with their being foretold both, as they were frequently. A fair Solution indeed may be given. They thought, what others of the People ſaid, *We have heard out of the Law, that Chriſt abideth for ever; and how ſayeſt thou, The Son of Man muſt be lifted up*[b]*?* Expecting therefore a victorious and immortal Meſſiah, they choſe, when he ſpoke of himſelf, as one who was to be taken and crucified, rather to put any Meaning, or none, upon the Prediction of his Death, and conſequently of his Reſurrection, than to underſtand each in its plain Meaning. But ſtill no one would forge a Fact wantonly, that muſt be attended with ſuch a Difficulty as this. Or, if any one had, he would ſcarce have divided the Matter ſo very exactly, as to repreſent the Diſciples, (which the Goſpels do) paying the higheſt Honours to his dead Body, though his dying extinguiſhed all their Proſpects from him; and when they had left off *truſting, that this was he, who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael*, yet aſſerting without the leaſt Doubt, that he *was a Prophet, mighty in Word and Deed, before God and all the People*[c].

[b] John xii. 34. [c] Luke xxiv. 19, 21.

Yet in Reality, ſuch was the very State of Mind, in which Perſons, with their Notions, muſt naturally be, till he roſe again, ſuppoſing the Scripture Hiſtory of him true: which therefore receives from hence a ſtrong Confirmation.

And when he roſe again, the Goſpel Account of that Event alſo carries the like internal Marks of Genuineneſs. Every Thing is told in the moſt artleſs Manner: hardly any of the moſt convincing Circumſtances dwelt upon, but merely related; and none, that may ſeem unfavourable to Chriſtianity, concealed or palliated. The Narration, a very lively Picture of the Diſorder and Confuſion, into which the Minds of the Apoſtles muſt be thrown by an Event ſo ſurpriſing, ſo intereſting; and laid before the World, with juſt ſuch Omiſſions and trifling Variations, as would happen of Courſe in giving it to the other Diſciples on the Spot; and as always do happen, when we inform thoſe around us, with the greateſt Simplicity, of what we know beſt. Every ſingle Part is conſiſtent with every other, when conſidered with due Attention and Candor. But if any were leſs ſo, a few Differences in minute Articles, relative to a Thing done ſeveral Years before, are never allowed to invali-

date a perfect Agreement in the main Fact. On the contrary, the Teſtimony of the Apoſtles, inſtead of becoming ſuſpicious on this Account, would indeed be rather more credible: as they would plainly appear not to ſpeak from previous Combination; but each to deliver fairly what he recollected, concerning a Matter, of which he was much too ſure in general, to be ſcrupulouſly accurate in Particulars. And the Holy Spirit, which guided them, might purpoſely forbear extending his Influence to ſome Things of ſmall Moment, that in After-times Men might ſhew whether they would be reaſonable, or whether they would cavil.

But one Thing, more eſpecially remarkable, the Writers of the New Teſtament have done, which no Impoſtors would ever have done: they have recorded the Hiſtory of their own Weakneſſes, and thoſe of all the Apoſtles, juſt as frankly and unaffectedly, as they have done every Thing elſe; and in no Point more fully, than in the capital one of the Reſurrection. They acknowledge themſelves, in general, to have diſregarded ſuch repeated Proofs of it, as deſerved the utmoſt Regard. And, to come now cloſer to the proper Subject of my Text, one of them acquaints us, that St. *Thomas* particularly, having once fixed it in his Mind, that

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the Thing was not likely, and the Evidence not ſufficient; inſiſted, that nothing leſs than his own ſeeing and feeling the Marks of the Wounds ſhould convince him, that it was a Reality, and not an Apparition; the ſame Perſon, and not another.

Now this is going a very uncommon, and it may ſeem an incredible, Length; but there have been and are Perſons, on ſome Occaſions full as unreaſonable, though otherwiſe deſerving of much Eſteem. And we learn from a Paſſage in St. *John*, which there is no Colour for thinking was written to account for this before us, that St. *Thomas*'s Temper was peculiarly determined and reſolute. Our Saviour, on the Death of *Lazarus* in *Judea*, declares his Purpoſe of returning thither from *Galilee*. His Followers diſſuade him, becauſe he had lately been in great Danger there: He perſiſts: *Then ſaid Thomas unto his Fellow-Diſciples, Let us alſo go that we may die with him*[d]. Now the ſame ſteady Firmneſs, when fixed on any other Point, however different, would be, as we find it here, equally hard to move. And therefore his Poſitiveneſs to truſt no one but himſelf, is far from being improbable. Yet it was notwithſtanding very blameworthy.

[d] John xi. 16.

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For of whatſoever one Man's Senſes can judge, another's can judge likewiſe: and if credible Witneſſes are not credited, all the Affairs of human Life muſt be at a ſtand.

However, this Perverſeneſs being accompanied with no bad Meaning; *Thomas* having only carried ſomewhat further, than his Companions, the Diffidence, of which they had all been guilty; perhaps too thinking his Maſter's Promiſe, that they ſhould ſee him, a good Plea for holding out till he, as well as the reſt, had ſeen him; and continuing all the while in the Fellowſhip of the other Apoſtles, ready to receive the Proof which he demanded; our bleſſed Lord with perfect Goodneſs offers it him fully. *Reach hither thy Finger, and behold my Hands; and reach hither thy Hand, and thruſt it into my Side: and be not faithleſs, but believing*[e]. This Condeſcenſion immediately melted down his Obſtinacy, and awakened every right Diſpoſition within him: ſo that, far from inſiſting on the rigorous Scrutiny, which he had before reſolved to make, and was now invited to, he *anſwered, and ſaid unto him*, we may partly imagine with what inward Feelings, *my Lord, and my God*[f]. *Jeſus*, in whom Dignity and

[e] John xx. 27. [f] John xx. 28.

Mildneſs

Mildneſs were mixed in the moſt accurate Proportion, ſpares his Convert the additional Confuſion of a Reproof: but gives him an Inſtruction, ſuitable to the Occaſion, neceſſary for himſelf, and uſeful to all the World ever after; that no great Virtue could be ſhewn merely by admitting ſcarcely reſiſtible Evidence, and conſequently no great Recompence could be expected for it: but that preſerving a Mind, open to embrace, and careful to ſeek after, ſuch lower Degrees and leſs obvious Kinds of it, as our heavenly Father may think fit to beſtow, is giving a valuable Proof of upright Intention, and taking a conſiderable Step towards the Attainment of diſtinguiſhed Happineſs hereafter. *Becauſe thou haſt ſeen me, thou haſt believed: bleſſed are they that have not ſeen and yet have believed.*

This Declaration doth not mean, that any Believers merit a Bleſſing; which our Faith no more deſerves, than our good Works do: but only, that Faith, productive of good Works, qualifies them to receive from God's free Gift, that Bleſſing, which Chriſt hath merited. Nor doth the former Part of it, which comparatively ſlights the Faith of St. *Thomas*, imply, that our Saviour's perſonal Attendants, who had the Teſtimony of Senſe for his Reſurrection

tion and other Miracles, were either preclud-ed from any Reward, or confined to a ſmall one. For they had overcome very ſtrong Prejudices: and, had they manifeſted ever ſo little Virtue in the ſpeculative Part of their Faith; yet they might and did manifeſt a great deal in the practical Part; by adhering to it under Temptations, by profeſſing it under Perſecutions, by promoting it with unwearied Zeal: on which Accounts a ſuperior Degree of Glory was juſtly promiſed to the Apoſtles; notwithſtanding *they believed becauſe they had ſeen*.

But our Concern is chiefly with the latter Clauſe of the Text: and let us conſider well, what our Saviour teaches in it. Not that they are bleſſed, who have had no Evidence, and yet have believed. In one Senſe indeed, of great Importance, even theſe are bleſſed. They have thrown themſelves, with humble Minds, on God's Mercy: they are directed by the wiſeſt Precepts: they enjoy the nobleſt Hopes: a future State is not leſs real, for their Want of Skill to prove it: and whatever the Ground of their Faith may be; ſtill the Fruit of it, Piety and moral Goodneſs, are the true Qualifications for Happineſs, here and hereafter. But though ſuch Perſons are doubtleſs rewardable for the Conſequences

Confequences of their Belief, they are not fo for their Belief itfelf, confidered as a meer Affent of the Mind. And therefore our bleffed Redeemer fpeaks here of a different Cafe from theirs. He came, not to require of Men Faith without or beyond Evidence, but to lay Evidence before them: and to affure them, that paying reafonable Attention to it, fhould be rewarded, and rejecting it unreafonably, punifhed.

Some indeed have argued, that what appears to us falfe, we cannot receive; what appears to us true, we cannot help receiving; and Things will appear as they do: fo that in Belief or Difbelief there can be neither Praife nor Blame. But, as by fhutting our Eyes, or turning them another Way, we can exclude the Sun itfelf from our Sight, if we pleafe: fo, by refufing to attend, we may evade the Force of the plaineft Proofs; and by attending partially, we may fuffer ourfelves to be overcome by the flighteft Objections. Much more then is it poffible to judge wrong or right in Matters lefs clear; according as we do or do not permit vicious Inclination, groundlefs Prepoffeffion, Indolence or Fancy to influence our Choice. And having it as truly in our Power to behave well or ill in this Refpect, as in any other; we may

may be as accountable for our Opinions as our Actions. It is therefore no lefs real, and fometimes no lefs important, a Part of our Duty, to conduct our Underftandings well, than our Affections and Appetites. And further, as in the Government of thefe laft, we are to be ftrict in Proportion as Negligence would be hurtful; and lefs Care is requifite, where little or no Harm can follow: fo in the Ufe of our reafoning Faculty, though we ought to avoid all Errors, if we can; yet we fhould be much more vigilant againft Errors to the Difadvantage of Religion and Virtue, than Errors in their Favour; and our Guilt is greater, if we are not: becaufe the former muft be pernicious, and the latter may be innocent.

But perhaps it will be faid, that, whatever God intends for the Rule of our Faith and Practice, he hath certainly made both the Truth and the Meaning of it fo clear, that we cannot miftake about it: and therefore whatever Doctrines or Precepts are not fo clear, need not be regarded by us. Now undoubtedly, were we to have chofen our own Condition, we fhould have chofen it to be thus pleafing and fecure. Or, were we to have gueffed about it beforehand, we might have been

been apt to gueſs it would be ſo. But now, when we know from Fact, what it is in other Reſpects; to flatter ourſelves, that in Reſpect of Religion it muſt needs be ſo perfectly agreeable to our Inclinations, is palpably abſurd. In every Part of our Conduct beſides, we are liable to err fatally. How can we imagine then that there is no poſſible Hazard in this Part? The World, in which we live, was not deſigned for a Place of Safety but of Trial. And as we are tried with many Difficulties in doing what is right, why may not we be tried with ſome in diſcovering it? Indeed we actually experience that we are. In Multitudes of Caſes, great Attention is requiſite to find out Truth: and yet great Inconveniences follow, if we miſs of it. We have certainly Cauſe to hope, that the Goodneſs of God will relieve us ſome Way, ſooner or later, from any extreme ill Conſequences of the Miſtakes, that we cannot help. But they have no Title to Relief, who, notwithſtanding all that they ſee to the contrary, will be poſitive, that there can be no Danger, and therefore needs be no Care; but what they do not fully underſtand, and are not abſolutely ſure of, they may reject without Heſitation. Theſe very Perſons, in their temporal Affairs, are ſtrongly moved by what they apprehend but

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very imperfectly; believe every Day upon mere Probabilities, often ſmall ones; take great Notice even of Poſſibilities; and would think and find it Madneſs to act otherwiſe. Why then may not Religion, conſidering its awful Nature, deſerve a reverend Regard from them, though the Proofs of it were leſs cogent, or its Truths more embarraſſed with Difficulties, than they are? The mere Suſpicion, that a juſt and holy Being rules the World, makes our Caſe, and ought to make our Behaviour, very different from what it would be elſe. Every Degree of Evidence for it increaſes the Difference. And the obſcureſt Intimations, that can be given us, concerning his Nature, our own Condition, and what he expects from us, deſerve our moſt ſerious practical Notice.

Nor muſt it be objected, that if ſuch Things were intended to influence human Life, every one would experience their Influence very powerfully, which many do not. For was not Reaſon, was not the Principle of Self-preſervation intended to influence human Life? Yet are there not Multitudes, who ſhew, and who have, comparatively, very little of either? But you will ſay, Then our Maker doth not deal equally with us. And in one Senſe it is true: he

he doth not confer equal Advantages on us. But what Claim have we to them? If he may create various Orders of Beings, one much superior to another, as we all know he hath done; he may certainly give one Part of the same Order what Superiority he pleases over another Part. And that we should be ignorant, why he doth so, is no more a Wonder, than that we are ignorant, why Men are not Angels, or why Brutes are not Men. Yet, in another Sense, our Maker deals very equally by us all. He will make due Allowance, both to the inward Frame and outward Condition of every Individual; requiring only according to what he hath bestowed: which is perfectly consistent with bestowing on some far more than on others.

But it will be said, that whatever Imperfection or whatever Inequalities there may be from Mens Faculties or Circumstances, in their Knowledge, either of the particular Doctrines and Precepts, or the general Obligation of natural Religion; yet if God vouchsafes to superadd a Revelation, one main End of that must be, to dispel the Darkness, in which Reason leaves us; and it must answer its End: and yet in the Christian Revelation many Things re-

main as dark, as they were before. But indeed the Solution of the former Objection, solves the present also. If God may justly give us, at first, as low a Capacity, or as little Opportunity, for Knowledge, as he pleases: why may he not afterwards make as small an Addition to it as he pleases; and yet Man be bound to receive such Addition with Thankfulness, and regulate his Conduct by it? If but the least new Discovery is made to us, if but the least new Light is thrown on what we discerned imperfectly before, it deserves proportionable Gratitude. And how much then do we owe for the many alarming and endearing Truths, Part of which are notified solely, and Part very strongly confirmed, by the Gospel of Christ!

But perhaps it will be urged, that still, besides leaving several of the Doubts of Reason undetermined, and its Difficulties unremoved, Scripture hath added several more to them, arising from its own mysterious Doctrines: and instead of clearing up every Thing, proposes to our Belief some Things impossible to be cleared up; with which otherwise we should never have been perplexed. And we own this to be Fact. But then, doth not the teaching of

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almoſt any new Branch of Science, in the whole Compaſs of Nature, produce the ſame Effect? Truth is infinite: our Capacities finite. And the neceſſary Conſequence is, that the farther our Knowledge extends, whenever we attempt to look beyond it, (which we need not) the wider we ſhall find the unknown Region, that borders upon it on all Sides, and incloſes it round about. So that, if we will inſiſt on comprehending every Thing, before we believe any Thing, the more is made known to us, the leſs we ſhall obtain of the Satisfaction we demand.

Once more, however, it may be objected; that ſuppoſing God to favour Men with a Revelation, he would certainly not fail to provide, that all Men might enjoy its full Benefit, ſince they are all ſaid to have needed it from the earlieſt Ages: whereas Chriſtianity appeared late in the World, hath never been notified through the whole of it, nor been accompanied with equal Evidence where it hath been preached. But here again: if God is not bound to give all Men originally the ſame Advanttages, with regard to Religion or any Thing elſe, as he plainly doth not, how is he bound to it in what He ſuperadds? Neither Juſtice, nor Wiſdom, nor Goodneſs, oblige him any more to the one, than the other. Yet he did

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manifeſt to fallen Man immediately as much of the Doctrine of Redemption as he ſaw to be requiſite: which if Men loſt, inſtead of propagating it, the Fault was their own. They who were ignorant of Chriſt before his Coming, or have been ſo ſince, may poſſibly have received much Good from it; but aſſuredly cannot be in a worſe Condition, becauſe others know him. And there is evidently more Kindneſs in making him known to ſome, than to none. All, to whom his Goſpel is preached, be it with more Evidence or leſs, are, or may be, the better for it if they will. Such as firmly believe and obey it, have the higheſt Aſſurance of Pardon, Grace, and everlaſting Happineſs. Whoever thinks it but probable, hath both a Direction and a Comfort, which others have not. Whoever by Means of it is but ſtrengthened in the Principles of natural Religion, nay whoever hath them but more frequently laid before him, may gain conſiderable Improvement from it. For even the bare Propoſal of Truth is often efficacious both againſt Ignorance and Error.

If ſtill it be imagined ſtrange, that this great Remedy for our Souls hath been a Secret to ſo many for ſo long a Time, is rejected by ſome who ſay they have examined it, and hath little

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or no good Effect on others who profess to accept it; consider only, what is the Case of the best Remedies for our bodily Diseases? Were they discovered with Ease and immediately? Are all Persons now apprized of them? Is there no Room left for Doubt concerning them? Do none declare and inveigh against them? Do they answer, in every Case, every good Purpose that Nature intended them for? We have but too much Experience of the contrary. And yet doth all this hinder them from being valuable Gifts of Providence; or justify those, who despise or neglect them? If not, why should any one be staggered by similar Objections against Religion? Nay, supposing they did lessen the Certainty of it, why should he not *take Heed*, while he travels thro' the obscure and doubtful Road of Life, to every Probability of Direction from above, *as unto a Light that shineth in a dark Place*, however faintly it be, *until the Day-dawn, and the Day-star arise in his Heart*[g]?

This would be our Wisdom, though the Evidences, which we have for Christianity, were of the lowest Kind. But what will be the Folly and Guilt of scorning it, if after all they should, as they do, approach to the

[g] 2 Pet. i. 19.

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highest? We have not indeed the immediate Testimony of our Senses for the Resurrection of Christ, for his other Miracles, and those of his Apostles: but we are as sure of them, as we could have been if we had lived within a Century or two of their Days. For the Books of the New Testament are unquestionably of no less Authority now, than they were 1500 Years ago. And even they, who received personally the Account of these mighty Works from Eye-witnesses to them, had perhaps but few of them the Attestation of so many concurrent Witnesses, as we have, recorded in holy Writ. And they could not have in the same Degree (what Length of Time alone can give completely, and hath given us) the Knowledge, that those Facts, which were at first delivered to them for true, were not afterwards discovered to be false. We are certain, that Christianity, far from being detected, established itself on Earth, and triumphed over both *Jewish* and *Pagan* Unbelief by Evidence alone: that many of its Prophecies are already fulfilled, and Room is left, after so many Ages, for the fulfilling of the rest: which last Point alone will be found, on due Consideration, a remarkable Circumstance, and very unlikely to be accidental. Then further: as some

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of the Arguments for it are grown ſtronger than they were formerly, to make Amends for ſuch as may have grown weaker; ſo we have others which muſt always continue of the ſame Force: thoſe, which ariſe from the Amiableneſs, the Dignity, the Perfection of our Saviour's Character; from the Excellency and Efficacy of his Precepts; from the internal Marks of Genuineneſs and Veracity in the Writings of the Evangeliſts and Apoſtles.

Yet all this Proof, we confeſs, amounts not to the abſolutely full Conviction, which they had, who *ſaw with their Eyes, who looked upon, and their Hands handled the Word of Life*[h]. It is neither ſo obvious, but we may overlook it; nor ſo powerful, but, if we take Pains, we may reſiſt it. Here then we undergo a Teſt of our Fairneſs and Integrity, which, in Compariſon at leaſt, the very firſt Chriſtians did not. But then, you ſee, our gracious Maſter hath proportioned a Bleſſedneſs to it. And beſides, they and their Succeſſors underwent a much ſeverer Teſt, which we do not; that of dreadful worldly Sufferings for the Profeſſion of the Goſpel. Ours is far gentler, and more eligible: only whether we will be-

[h] 1 John i. 1.

lieve on Evidence abundantly sufficient, though not the highest possible: whether we will *walk by Faith, not by Sight*[i]; and preserve our Loyalty to *our Lord and our God*, unshaken by the false Opinions and bad Customs of a thoughtless World, by the Cravings of sensual Appetites, and the Tumults of irregular Passions and Fancies. This is the whole of what Heaven requires of us: and if we do it but conscientiously for the short Space, that we have to remain here, *the Trial of our Faith shall be found unto Praise and Honour and Glory at the Appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, we have loved; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we* may justly *rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*; assured of *receiving the End of our Faith, even the Salvation of our Souls*[k].

[i] 2 Cor. v. 7.   [k] 1 Pet. i. 7, 8, 9.

SERMON X.

ROM. x. 10.

For with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness: and with the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation.

A Considerable Part of professed Christians go through the World without forming to themselves any fixed Rules of Action at all: but in some Things follow their own Inclination and Fancy, how often soever it varies; in others, general Custom or particular Examples, with much Indifference, whether they be good or bad: and so they patch up a most inconsistent Life; many of them scarce ever reflecting enough to see their Inconsistencies; and not a few absurdly imagining, that human Conduct was not intended to be of a Piece with itself.

Others, who do preserve Uniformity of Behaviour, have yet no inward Principle from whence

whence it flows, beyond Reputation or private Convenience. Even they who profeſs a high Regard to Morals, and in ſome Inſtances appear to feel it, have too commonly no Feeling at all of the ſtrongeſt moral Tie which can be, that which binds us to our Maker; perhaps have never aſked themſelves in Earneſt, whether they believe in him: or, if they think they do, have no ſerious Impreſſions of Gratitude to the Author of all Good, of Duty to the Governor of the Univerſe: will acknowledge, it may be, when preſſed by Argument, that all poſſible Reverence is owing to him; yet abſolutely never worſhip him in private, and very ſeldom condeſcend even to ſeem to worſhip him in public. Whatever the haſty Reaſonings of a partial Heart ſuggeſt to them, they will eſteem a Law of God and Nature. But if any Thing unwelcome either to their Vanity or their Senſuality be offered to their Belief, they will reject it inſtantly, as Bigotry and Folly, without Examination. And if their Way of thinking and living be but ſuch, upon the whole, as recommends them to the Indulgence of thoſe who need the ſame Indulgence; as to any Thing further, concerning the Regulation of their Tempers or Behaviour, the Means of Pardon when

when they have ſinned, or of Help to do better, there is little Occaſion, they apprehend, to trouble themſelves.

This View of Things cannot but raiſe compaſſionate and melancholy Reflexions in every pious Breaſt. But what completes the Unhappineſs is, that while ſuch Numbers openly deſpiſe Religion, great Numbers more, who have no doubt of its Truth, nor, when they conſider, of its Importance, are yet ſo far from being zealous for it, that they ſeem aſhamed of it: either omitting thoſe public Evidences of their Chriſtianity, which they know they are commanded to give; or meanly excuſing their Obſervance of religious Duties as Weakneſs or Compliance with Cuſtom: and ſeldom ſhewing in their common Converſation near ſo much Concern for that Faith, from which they pretend to promiſe themſelves eternal Felicity, as they do for their ſlighteſt worldly Intereſts, not to ſay their moſt trifling Amuſements.

The Spirit of God therefore, who clearly foreſaw, that this, however ſtrange, would be the Turn of Mankind, that ſome would think it needleſs to believe, and others to profeſs their Belief, hath warned Men ſeparately againſt each of theſe Errors in many Places of the New Teſtament,

Testament, and jointly against both in the Text: which plainly declares, that Faith in the Gospel is the Ground of our Acceptance with God at present; and that an open Acknowledgment of the Gospel, in Consequence of that Faith, is one of the Things necessary to our Happiness hereafter. *For with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness: and with the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation.*

From these Words therefore I shall endeavour to explain the Obligation and Importance,

I. Of Christian Faith.

II. Of a public Avowal of it.

I. The Obligation and Importance of Christian Faith.

God, having made us reasonable Creatures, may both as justly and as wisely require from us that we conduct our Understandings aright, as our Affections, Appetites, or outward Actions; the Conduct of all which depends on our Understandings in a great Degree. If then Religion be attended with Appearance of Evidence, inquiring into it must be our *Duty*: and if the Evidence deserves Belief, Unbelief must be a Sin; a greater or smaller indeed, according as it arises from Neglects or Prejudices more or less criminal; but a Sin it must be, wherever the Proofs are within Reach.

And

And we may not only well preſume that God would make them ſufficiently obvious, but on Trial may perceive that he hath: adapting a great Variety of them to every Degree both of natural Capacity and acquired Knowledge, in ſuch a Manner, that no one needs be deſtitute, where Chriſtianity is freely taught, of Light enough to convince and direct him.

Doubtleſs we ought to judge of Unbelievers with the utmoſt reaſonable Charity. But, at the ſame Time, both we and they ſhould conſider well our Saviour's Declaration, that *If any Man will do God's Will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God*[a]. For thence it follows, that they who fail of knowing his Doctrine, where it is *taught as the Truth is in Jeſus*[b], fail of it for Want of doing his Will. Either vicious Pleaſure, or worldly Intereſts, or Indolence, or Reſentment miſleads them, which are viſibly the common Caſes; or, let them be ever ſo clear of Guilt in theſe Particulars, they are influenced by the Vanity of being ſuperior to vulgar Ways of thinking; the Pride of not being convinced, but by juſt ſuch Evidence as they pleaſe to require; or the Preſumptuouſneſs of oppoſing their own Ima-

[a] John xii. 17. [b] Eph. iv. 21.

ginations

ginations concerning the Probabilities of Things, (notwithſtanding daily Experience of their Miſtakes) to the expreſs Declarations of an all-knowing God. In vain do Men plead their Morals in other Reſpects, while ſuch Immoralities as theſe have Dominion over them; or their Obedience to the Commands of the Almighty, while they reject the great Commandment of Faith in his Word.

But the Duty of Faith doth not conſiſt merely in giving our Aſſent to the Truths of Religion: a principal Part of it is, to recollect them frequently, and ſtrengthen their Influence by repeated and voluntary Acts of the Mind. There are perhaps few in proportion, who had not a Sort of Belief, when they thought of the Matter laſt. But their Faith hath lain aſleep and forgotten, till not only their Lives have been filled with ſuch Behaviour, but their Minds with ſuch Notions and Maxims, that it is hard to ſay, which prevails moſt in them, the Chriſtian or the Infidel. Or if they remain ever ſo much perſuaded, that Religion is true; they come to look upon it, as a Truth upon which they are not to act, and ſcarce to think of, till they have almoſt done acting. And by that Time, ſome have neglected it ſo long, that they go

on, with great Tranquillity, neglecting it to the End; while some again awake from this Dream only to fall into another, that being sorry for having omitted their Duty, when it is become too late to do it, is doing it sufficiently. They, whose Faith lies in this Manner dead in them, have in Effect none at all; none of the right Sort, none to any valuable Purpose. And therefore the great Thing incumbent on us is, to revive and exert our Persuasions of Divine Truths; oppose them to the Temptations which assault us in this bad World; and believe, not with a languid Acquiescence in certain Articles and Precepts, when at distant Times we happened to recollect them; but with a vigorous Effort of all our Faculties to feel their Force on every Occasion. For it is not with the Understanding alone, but *with the* whole *Heart*, that *Man believeth unto Righteousness*. Nor do we become of the Number of the Faithful indeed, till we are determined effectually to bear Faith and true Allegiance to our heavenly King, as well as are convinced of his Title to our Obedience: till we resolve to live to him, who we believe, hath died for us; and bring forth the *Fruits of the Spirit* [c], who hath planted the

[c] Gal. v. 22.

Seeds

Seeds of them in our Hearts. By this Rule then let us *examine ourſelves*, (for it much concerns us) *whether we be* really *in the Faith*[d], or only ſeem ſo to be, deceiving our own Souls.

I now proceed to ſhew the Importance of this Duty: which is fully expreſſed in ſaying, that *Man believeth unto Righteouſneſs*: that is, by means of Chriſtian Faith, he becomes acceptable to God, and gradually improves in all Piety and Virtue.

Every one of our Actions derives its Value from the Belief or Perſuaſion, with which it is performed. Were we to do ever ſo good a Work, without being moved to it by a good Principle, we might be more uſeful, but we ſhould ſcarce be better, than if we had not done it at all. But when we act from Conviction of an inward Obligation; if it be of Morals, then we act virtuouſly; if of Religion, piouſly. Therefore without Faith of one Sort, we can do neither: and in Proportion as our Faith is perfect, we ſhall do both. A mere Senſe of the Fitneſs of moral Virtue is no inconſiderable Antidote againſt many Sins. But religious Faith hath unſpeakable Advantages beyond that which is moral only. For the ſerious Perſuaſion

[d] 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

of a Witneſs, *who ſeeth in ſecret*[e], of an omnipotent Sovereign, equally benevolent, wiſe, juſt, and holy, muſt inconceivably animate to every Thing good, and deter from every Thing evil.

Yet ſtill, conſidering our native Ignorance, and the original Depravity which we find within; conſidering alſo, that by repeated Tranſgreſſions we fail not, more or leſs, to inflame our Paſſions and Appetites, darken our Underſtandings, impair our Strength, obſcure the Proſpect of all that we could hope for, and open a dreadful one of what we may fear: the Faith of natural Religion alone would leave us in a great Meaſure undirected, unaſſiſted, uncomforted; as the Experience of all, who have been favoured with no other Guide, hath always ſhewn. Nay, inſtead of ever giving in Fact, the Help, which from Reaſoning we conclude it might, it hath always, in all Nations, been overwhelmed with Errors, both ſpeculative and practical. But Revelation amply beſtows on us every Thing we want; a plain and complete Law of Life, a moſt engaging Example of perfect Conformity to it, Pardon of Sin on moſt equitable Terms, Aid from above to do our Duty, and eternal Hap-

[e] Matth. vi. 6.

pineſs for a ſincere, though imperfect Performance of it. How greatly we ſtand in Need of theſe Things, a little ſerious Thought will make any one feel. Or if it did not, we ſurely muſt ſee, that God would not have offered them to Man, by a Method ſo extraordinary, as the Incarnation and Death of his Son, and upon the expreſs Condition of Faith in him as the Author of them, if there had not been ſtrong Reaſons for it. And therefore whoever ſlights theſe appointed Means *of God's Righteouſneſs*, muſt expect to ſtand or fall on the Foot of *his own*[f], without Allowance; and will have nothing to plead hereafter againſt bearing the Puniſhment of all his Sins, but principally the capital and leading one, of a wilful and careleſs Unbelief. May God incline our Hearts to conſider what we are, and to accept his Mercy! For then, *being juſtified by his Grace, we ſhall be made Heirs of eternal Life*[g]; be *ſanctified by the Holy Ghoſt*[h], and gradually *perfected in every good Work to do his Will*[i]: a State, not merely of outward Regularity, but of inward Purity, which our natural Abilities themſelves can never attain.

[f] Rom. x. 3. [g] Tit. iii. 7. [h] Rom. xv. 16.
[i] Heb. xiii. 21.

But in order to this amongſt other Duties, we muſt join with our Faith, as the Text inſtructs us,

II. An open Avowal of it. For *with the Mouth Confeſſion is made unto Salvation.*

There is no Part of the Goſpel delivered in a more ſolemn and ſtriking Manner, than that, which three of the four Evangeliſts record, and one of them twice: *Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before Men, him will I confeſs alſo before my Father, which is in Heaven: but whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me and my Words in this adulterous and ſinful Generation; of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father with the holy Angels*[k]. It could not be a ſlight Cauſe, which moved him to ſpeak thus: and there was evidently a very great one. He came to eſtabliſh on Earth a public Profeſſion of true Religion, for a Teſtimony to all Nations. He intended his Diſciples for *the Light of the World.* He formed his Church to be as *a City on a Hill*[l], to attract the Eyes, and direct the Steps of bewildered Travellers. Concealment therefore was utterly inconſiſtent with his Deſign: and all who believed in him muſt

k Matth. x. 32, 33. Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26. xiii. 8, 9.
l Matth. v. 14.

acknowledge him. That Persecution and Death would be the Consequence, he forewarned them, was to be no Objection. They were neither *to forsake the assembling of themselves together*[m], nor dissemble their Faith, when separate; but to *sanctify the Lord God in their Hearts, and be ready to give an Answer to every Man that asked them an Account of the Hope, that was in them*[n].

This then being their Case, what shall we think is ours? Can it be allowed us, can we wish it were allowed us, to avoid bearing Testimony to him, who *hath redeemed us to God by his Blood*[o], when it will cost us only a little harmless Contempt, and perhaps not even that? Or whatever we may wish, let us remember, that in his just-mentioned awful Declaration, it is not being afraid, but *ashamed of him*, that he condemns: it is not the Terror of a persecuting *Generation*, but the Scorn of a *sinful and adulterous* one, by which he cautions us not to be moved. If therefore we conceal, on account of that Scorn, any Part of our religious Professions, we are guilty in the very Particular, against which his Sentence is pointed: and more guilty still, if we slight it, without so much as this to excuse

[m] Heb. x. 25. [n] 1 Pet. iii. 15. [o] Rev. v. 9.

us; from mere Indolence or Humour; or because, resolving to be Wicked, we will not acknowledge what binds us to be Good.

But to see the Obligation of this Duty in a fuller Light, let us consider in a distincter View, the Nature, the Reasonableness, the Usefulness of it.

We are not required to make an Ostentation of our Christianity; or to introduce even the Mention of it to the Irreligious unseasonably, but only when there is Hope of doing Good. None who is not well prepared in Point of Argument, should be desirous of entering into Conversation about it with Unbelievers. But especially the Young and tender-minded should be very cautious of engaging in so unequal a Combat, as that of ingenuous Modesty against the profligate Boldness of the Scorner and the Libertine. Or if at any Time they are compelled to it, they should insist on the general Proofs of Christianity, and not be drawn into Debates on particular Difficulties, which, probably they are not able to solve without Help; but wave the present Discussion of them, and apply for due Information about them. Nay indeed, the fittest in all Respects to *contend for the Faith*[p] should watch Oppor-

[p] Jude, ver. 3.

tunities, not force them, left they exasperate and harden Men, instead of reclaiming them. And, be the Occasion of declaring ourselves ever so proper, we should be careful not to do it with intemperate Warmth; but always preserve the Spirit of our Religion, while we assert its Honour; and express more Concern for the Impious and Profane, than Indignation at them; considering seriously the Miseries, in this World and the next, which they bring upon themselves, as well as on those whom they seduce.

After guarding against these Mistakes, what is the Duty which remains? Only this, that without Forwardness or Affectation, without Vehemence or Bitterness, every Christian avow himself, in every becoming Way, to be what he is; by constantly attending the public Worship of God, renewing his baptismal Vow in the solemn Ordinance of Confirmation, statedly coming to the holy Table; and shewing, by the Reverence of his Deportment, that he doth all this as Matter of Conscience, not of Form; by practising with Simplicity and Openness every other Precept of his Religion; and leaving no Room to doubt, from what Principle he

Jude ver. 3.

acts: by *abstaining from all Appearance of Evil*[q] in his own Behaviour and Discourse, and approving it in that of others: by despising the Contempt or Hatred, which may fall upon him for such a Conduct; *esteeming* as an Honour *the Reproach of Christ*; and *chusing rather to suffer Affliction*, if he must, *with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season*[r].

These are the Things, comprehended in the Confession, that Scripture enjoins. And is any one of them unfit to be done by us, or unworthy to be required of us, or too heavy a Burthen to be laid upon us? And if none be, what have we to object? We cannot be Neuters between Religion and Irreligion: neither God nor Man will understand us to be such. Our Lord himself hath made the Declaration, and it is no less just, than peremptory, *He that is not with me, is against me*[s]. Which then are we? Enemies or Friends? Do we pronounce, by declining to appear for it, that the Gospel of Christ is of no Value; or, by *not being ashamed of it, that it is the Power of God unto Salvation*[t]?

[q] 1 Theff. v. 22. [r] Heb. xi. 25, 26. [s] Matth. xii. 30. [t] Rom. i. 16.

But indeed, were it allowable to be of neither Part openly, is it adviſable? By declaring ourſelves for the Truth, we ſtrengthen ourſelves in it: we take up a Character, which it will be our Glory and our Happineſs that we are bound to maintain. And in all Likelihood we ſhall thus get rid of Solicitations from Infidels and Libertines: who will never quit us, while they find us wavering or fearful to be touched, upon the Subject; but will ſurely, either from Decency or Deſpair, be ſilent, when we have notified in a prudent Manner our fixed Reſolution. To this we might alſo, if Need were, add a moſt equitable Requeſt; that as they ſet up for the great and only Friends of Liberty, they would tolerate us in an Error, (if it can be one) which tends to make every Individual virtuous, and every Society flouriſhing; which comforts us under all Afflictions here, and delights us with the Hope of endleſs Felicity hereafter: and that they would not think the Belief of an ungoverned World, of unrewarded Virtue, and unpuniſhed Villany; of God's having left his Creatures without Inſtruction in their Duty, without Certainty of his Pardon and Grace, without Aſſurance of their future Exiſtence

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and Reward, ſo extremely meritorious a Doctrine; as to intitle the Maintainers of it to perſecute the reſt of Mankind with Scorn and Ridicule, (the only Weapons they have) till all are brought to an Unity of Profeſſion in this bleſſed Creed.

Concealing our Faith may indeed ſecure us from being attacked upon it; but not from the Dangers of licentious Diſcourſe, not from being tempted in various Ways by others, not from growing indifferent and betraying ourſelves into Sin. Beſides: whilſt we keep our Principles unknown, through a mean-ſpirited Fear of bad Men, we miſs the Eſteem and Friendſhip of the good: which may be of unſpeakable Uſe to us; perhaps in the moſt important Reſpect, enabling us to *hold faſt our Integrity*[u].

But we are to meaſure the Value of owning our Regard to Religion, not only by the Benefit, which we may receive from it, but the Service, which we may do by it. One Branch of it is, frequenting public Worſhip. Now it is very true, that many who ſtay at Home, can uſe the ſame Prayers, and read as good Sermons in private, as they hear in the Congregation.

[u] Job ii. 3.

gregation. But, (besides that probably they will not if they can; and that certainly Numbers, whom their Practice may influence, cannot if they would;) were every single good Christian to spend the whole Time, which they employ in religious Exercises here together, just in the same Manner separately; still the mutual animating of each other, the instructive Example, the awakening Call to a thoughtless World, these Things would be lost; the Christian Church, *the Pillar and Ground of the Truth*[w], would fall to Ruin, by quick Degrees; the Christian System of Religion and Virtue would die and be forgotten with the present Believers in it, or even before them; excepting so much of it, as might perhaps be imperfectly preserved by Methods less effectual.

It is not therefore without Cause, that so great a Stress is laid on attending God's holy Ordinances: which whoever frequents reverently, teaches others to frequent them in the same Manner; but whoever shews Contempt of them, encourages others to do so too. And the like is the Case through the whole Extent of Piety and Morals. Where

[w] 1 Tim. iii. 15.

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our Influence is the weakeſt, yet every one who appears in Earneſt on the Side of God and Chriſt and Virtue, muſt add ſome Strength to the Cauſe, and ſome Spirit to the Supporters of it. It is a common Warfare, in which we are engaged. If any one be allowed to deſert his Station, every one muſt have the ſame Allowance: and then, humanly ſpeaking, what hinders, but all muſt be given up? The Patrons of Infidelity and Libertiniſm, who, as one ſhould think, have many Reaſons to be reſerved, they declare themſelves without the leaſt Scruple. Only conſider therefore, if we are to be ſhame-faced and ſilent, while they are bold and boaſtful; how monſtrous is the Impropriety, and how unhappy will be the Event!

But beſides the general Conſequences of *holding faſt the Profeſſion of our Faith without wavering*[x], or ſhrinking from it; let us reflect alſo, what particular Effects it may have on our Friends, our Dependants, our Servants, our Families; on thoſe who are united to us in the neareſt Relations, and whoſe Happineſs conſtitutes a great Part of our own. All who barely know us and think well of us, will of Courſe be in ſome Degree, either the

[x] Heb. x. 23.

ſteadier in the Faith and Practice of Chriſtianity for our public Adherence to it, or more unſettled for our ſeeming to ſlight it: and this one Difference in our Behaviour may very poſſibly have Weight enough with more than one amongſt them, to determine his Conduct, and State for ever. But ſuch as are intimate with us, will be more powerfully ſwayed by what they ſee in us. And they who live under our Roof, who naturally learn almoſt every Thing from us, who pride themſelves perhaps in being like us, there is no Hope that they will be religious, if they have any Ground to imagine, that we are not cordially ſo. But taking due Care to ſhew them that we are, will do much towards promoting their future Happineſs at the ſame Time with our own; and indeed the preſent Welfare too of both. For as Religion furniſhes the ſtrongeſt Motives to every Part of Virtue and Prudence; ſo unleſs our Example inſtruct thoſe around us to perform their Duty towards God, they will probably ſoon come to neglect it towards us, as well as towards others and themſelves: whereas giving Proof that we honour him, is the Way to be honoured in Thought, Word, and Deed, by them; by all the good, and even by moſt of the bad. Or

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how unequally ſoever Eſteem may be diſtributed now, all will be abundantly rectified in that deciſive Hour, when they, *that ſleep in the Duſt of the Earth, ſhall awake; ſome to everlaſting Life, and ſome to Shame and everlaſting Contempt:* when *they, that be wiſe, ſhall ſhine as the Brightneſs of the Firmament; and they, that turn many to Righteouſneſs, as the Stars, for ever and ever*[y].

[y] Dan. xii. 2, 3.

SER-

SERMON XI.

LUKE xiii. 23, 24.

Then ſaid one unto him, Lord, are there few that be ſaved? And he ſaid unto them, Strive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate: for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.

THERE is ſcarce any Thing which proves both Wiſdom and Rightneſs of Mind more fully, than proper Behaviour on ſudden Occaſions, and proper Anſwers to unforeſeen Queſtions: for what a Man ſhews himſelf to be at ſuch Times, we have in general great Cauſe to believe he really is. Now to this Trial, our Saviour, living a public Life, in the Midſt of Perſons taking all Advantages to inſnare him, was perpetually expoſed; and his Character

Character never ſuffered by it. His Temper continued always compoſed and beneficent: his Replies, when Circumſtances allowed it, were open and plain: at other Times mixed with prudent Reſerve; but always tending to convert the moſt unfit Enquiries into Opportunities of communicating ſeaſonable Inſtruction. One Inſtance of this, amongſt many, the Text affords: where we find, that as *he went through the Cities and Villages teaching*, ſome forward inquiſitive Man was earneſt to be told, if there ſhould be *few* or many *ſaved*. To this Enquirer perſonally he anſwered nothing: but reproving his ſuperfluous Inquiſitiveneſs by a Silence, that expreſſed at once Dignity and Mildneſs, addreſſed himſelf to all, that were preſent; acquainting them what was the whole, that they needed to know and remember, in Relation to that Subject: in diſcourſing on which, I ſhall conſider,

I. The Queſtion propoſed.

II. The Anſwer given to it.

I. The Queſtion is put in very general, and ſeemingly inoffenſive, Terms: yet probably a great deal of *Jewiſh* Pride and Uncharitableneſs couched under it. For conſidering the known Spirit of that People in thoſe Days, it is obvious

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to suspect, that this busy Man's Inquiry proceeded from an ill-natured Hope of being confirmed in the national Persuasion, that God was *not the God of the Gentiles* *; but had reserved future Happiness for the *Israelites* alone. And this is the more likely, both as their own Writers distinguish them by the Description of a *few*, in Opposition to the Multitude of Mankind[a]; and as our Saviour, in the Sequel of his Answer, declares that many *Gentiles*, from all Parts of the Earth, should be admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven; and many *Jews* excluded[b].

But supposing there was no Ground for Imputation either of ill Will or Vanity; still all such Questions, for this is a leading one to many others, are useless and irreverent. To be satisfied indeed, that the Lord and King of all is just and good and wise, we are essentially concerned; for, without it, we could neither honour and love him, nor enjoy any solid Comfort within ourselves. And this general Truth, our Ideas of what infinite Perfection must comprehend, and our Experience of a right and kind and prudent Constitution of

* Rom. iii. 29. and ix. 21, 22.

[a] See 2 Esdr. viii. 1, 3. Comp. v. 15, 16.

[b] Luke xiii. 28, 29.

 things,

Things, unite to prove to us in a very convincing Manner. Since then God is just, he will make none miserable, farther than they deserve: since he is good, he will both pardon and reward, in such Degree as is fit: and since he is wise, what appears Disorder and Confusion to our short Sight, will appear in the End perfect Regularity and Proportion. Had we been apprized only of thus much, we could have had no Right, however desirable it might have been, to know any Thing farther beforehand, even concerning ourselves; for it is enough, that we shall be treated with Equity and Mercy: much less could we have pleaded any Shadow of Right to be told, what Proportion of our Fellow-creatures shall behave well, and be accepted; or ill, and be punished; or why there are not more of the former, and fewer of the latter Sort; or any Thing of this Nature. To do our Duty, and trust God with the Government of his own World, would be our whole Concern.

Supposing him then to place us in a Station of much clearer Light; which, Thanks be to his infinite Bounty, he hath done; by adding those important Notifications, which we read in Scripture, of what we are to believe and do,

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to hope and fear: it cannot be, that his voluntary Communication of what he might have withheld, ſhould authorize us to demand ſtill more. Undoubtedly new Queſtions, in Abundance, may be aſked on this new Face of Things: but who is intitled to aſk them? And yet this is not inſiſted on, becauſe they cannot be anſwered; for moſt, if not all of them, may very eaſily. Why are ſo many Nations without the Knowledge or Belief of this important Revelation? Partly, becauſe Chriſtians have neglected to acquaint them with it, or mixed it with Corruptions, or diſgraced it with Wickedneſs of Life: partly, becauſe themſelves, or their Anceſtors, did not attend to it, when propoſed, with ſuch Fairneſs of Mind, as they ought. But what then ſhall become of thoſe Nations? Such among them as perſonally rejected the Goſpel, ſhall be puniſhed in proportion to the Wilfulneſs, or Careleſſneſs, that was the Cauſe of their ſo doing: ſuch as never knew it, ſhall be at leaſt in no worſe a Condition for it, perhaps in a better. But as to Chriſtians themſelves: Why have ſo many of them perverted their Religion ſo grievouſly? And why do ſo many of a purer Profeſſion lead moſt impure and ſinful Lives? Partly, becauſe

ſome lay Stumbling-blocks, of various Kinds, in the Way of their Brethren: but chiefly, becauſe others turn away their Eyes from the Light which they might have; or walk not ſuitably to that, which they actually have. And as, in all theſe Things, there are numberleſs Alleviations or Aggravations of Guilt; every Man ſhall be treated accordingly: ſome *beaten with many Stripes*, ſome *with few*[c]. But in particular, what either ſhall ſuffer, we neither are told, nor have Reaſon to complain that we are left ignorant; ſince it will be our own Fault, if we ſuffer any Thing at all. *Therefore*, as the Second Book of *Eſdras* juſtly exhorts, *Be not thou curious, how the Ungodly ſhall be puniſhed: but inquire, how the Righteous ſhall be ſaved*[d].

But Queſtions end not here. Suppoſing it Mens Fault, that they obey not the Laws of God: why were thoſe Laws made ſo ſtrict? Becauſe a holy Being could not enact any other, nor we be raiſed by any other to the ſpiritual Happineſs, which he deſigns for us hereafter. The only Way therefore was that, which he hath taken: firſt to ſet before us a perfect Rule of Life; then to make every Allowance, that is truly equitable, for our falling ſhort of it. But

c. Luke xii. 47, 48. d 2 Eſdr. ix. 13.

why

why was our Nature formed ſo liable to fall ſhort of it, in the ſad Degree that we often do? Why, if it had not, an Obedience, proportionably exacter, muſt have been required of us; with leſs Hope of Pardon, and heavier Puniſhment for Diſobedience; as in the Caſe of thoſe *Angels, which kept not their firſt Eſtate* [e]. And whatever Advantage it might have been, upon the whole, to inherit all the good Diſpoſitions, with which our firſt Parents were framed; unallayed with the bad ones, which they have tranſmitted to us; we are no more intitled to thoſe Advantages, than to the Poſſeſſions, which our Anceſtors have forfeited, or the ſtrong Conſtitutions which they have deſtroyed, for their Poſterity, as well as themſelves. In ſome Degree every created Nature muſt be imperfect. And on many Accounts, that Variety of Degrees, which we ſee in the Works of God, is fit and uſeful. We know the Reaſons, in Part at leaſt, for which, Beings, much lower than us, exiſt: why may there not then be very ſufficient Reaſons for our being no higher, than we are? And where ſhall Man, or Angel, reſt contented; if either may claim, as long as God can give? Poor as our Condition is here,

[e] Jude, ver. 6.

ſtill it was worthy of the Almighty to place us in it; elſe it had not been done: for we muſt allow him, who could make ſuch a World as this, to be a better Judge than us, whether it was fit for him to make it, or not. And were it to continue, to its final Period, the ſtrange Mixture of good and bad, which it is; yet conſidering the glorious Recompence, that going through it well prepares us for, we ſhall be far from having Cauſe to think hardly, or meanly, of Providence. But we have Aſſurance given us that the Days ſhall come, when *the Kingdoms of this World ſhall become the Kingdoms of the Lord and his Chriſt* [f], in a fuller Senſe, than they have ever been yet. And perhaps, the Times already paſt may bear only a ſmall Proportion to that joyful future Seaſon, when Religion ſhall be rightly underſtood and univerſally practiſed, Mankind be happy, and God glorified. Bleſſed are they, that ſhall live in this State of Things: more bleſſed they, that ſhall contribute to it.

But, though we ought to attend, carefully and thankfully, to whatever Information God gives us, yet all Eagerneſs of knowing more than is revealed, betrays the ſame wrong Turn

[f] Rev. xi. 15.

with

with that of the Inquirer in the Text; who, instead of the great Question, which it concerns every Man to ask, and which Christ came on Purpose to answer, "what he himself should do to be saved," chose to ask one, which he had no Concern in, and therefore could expect no Answer to, "How many should be saved." Accordingly our blessed Lord neither satisfied him, nor hath on any other Occasion declared, what Proportion of the human Race shall be happy, and what miserable. In one or two Places he seems to represent the former as the *least* Number[g]: in the Parable of the ten Virgins he makes them equal[h]: in that of the Servants, there is but one unfaithful[i]; in that of the Guests invited to Supper, but one that *had not on a Wedding Garment*[k]. And yet to this *last* Parable he hath added the Reflexion, that *many are called and few chosen*. In his own Days indeed this was most literally true: and has been too much so ever since. But still St. *John* foresaw a Time, in which one Part only of true Christians should be *a great Multitude, that no Man could number, of all Kindreds and People and Tongues*[l]: and the more ancient

[g] Matth. xx. 16. [h] Matth. xxv. 1, 2. [i] Matth. xxv. 15, &c. [k] Matth. xxii. 11. [l] Rev. vii. 9.

Prophets foretell, that all Nations *shall know the Lord*[m], *and all be righteous*[n]. Plainly then it could not be our Saviour's Design, upon the whole, to determine the Proportion between good and bad; but by a View of their Danger, to animate all in the zealous Pursuit of that Recompence, which, (be the Numbers of each what they would) too few obtained, whilst any failed of it: that so, as many as possible might be induced to take the right Course; and God be justified, how many soever took the wrong. Therefore, as the Book of *Esdras*, already quoted, exhorts, *Ask thou no more Questions concerning the Multitude of them that perish. For when they had taken Liberty, they despised the most High, thought Scorn of his Law, and forsook his Ways.—It was not his Will, that Men should come to nought: but they, which he created, have defiled the Name of him that made them, and were unthankful unto him, which prepared Life for them*[o]. Justly therefore doth our Saviour in the

II. Part of the Text, to which I now proceed, refuse to gratify the Querist's Curiosity, and return an Answer intirely practical: that it was not the Business of Mankind to pry into

[m] Jer. xxxi. 34. [n] Is. lx. 21. [o] 2 Esdr. viii. 55—60.

what

what God had hid, but mind what he had revealed, and to maſter another Kind of Difficulty, that of fulfilling his Commands: that Multitudes indeed, who profeſſed Religion, would finally appear to have profeſſed it in vain; but this was a Matter, not to raiſe idle Speculations upon: God would be ſure to take Care of his Behaviour to his Creatures; let them take Care of their Duty to him: whatever Number ſhould be ſaved, great or ſmall, they knew the Way, and there was but one, to become Part of it: *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate: for many, I ſay unto you, ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.* Not that any Chriſtian ſhall ever do his beſt to enter into Life, and fail of it: but that many imagine God hath marked out other Ways to Happineſs than obeying his Laws; and many too, who are fully ſenſible there is no other Way, uſe ſo little Diligence in following this, that their Progreſs is inſufficient to arrive at eternal Felicity.

One fatal Miſtake of Believers in Religion hath always been, an abſurd Notion, that their ſteady Faith in it, their Zeal to ſupport and ſpread that Faith, their punctilious Obſervance of certain Forms, their conſtant Practice of ſome Precepts, and their periodical Pretences

of

of Sorrow for having wilfully lived in the Neglect of the rest; that one or other of these Things would be accepted, instead of true Piety and Virtue. No throughly good Heart indeed can fall into this Error: but wrong Inclination, joined with Ignorance, or what is worse, false Instruction, may give it deep Root: and our Saviour, as he found it widely spread, took unwearied Pains to pluck it up. Immediately after the Text he declares, that neither Acknowledgment of his Authority, nor Attendance on his teaching, nor any Thing else, shall avail the *Workers of Iniquity*[p]. And in his Sermon on the Mount, after stating the Duties of Mankind in their utmost Purity and Strictness, he proceeds directly to urge his Hearers, in Words very little different from those now before us, to a careful Performance of them all, however difficult, as the only Method of attaining future Bliss. *Enter ye in at the strait Gate: for wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction; and many there be which go in thereat; but strait is the Gate, and narrow the Way, which leadeth unto Life; and few there be that find it*[q]. All, who preach other Doctrines, he pronounces, in the next

[p] Ver. 25, 26, 27. [q] Matth. vii. 13, 14.

Words,

Words, *false Prophets*: all who depend on other Hopes, even though they had personally followed him, and wrought Miracles in his Name, he utterly disowns, and assures them, they have laid their Foundation on the Sand. Indeed, through the whole of his Ministry, he had but one Rule, in relation to this Matter: *If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments*[r]. When the twelve, whom he had chosen, came, with great Satisfaction, to give him an Account of the mighty Works they had wrought, and the Devils they had cast out, he partakes in their Joy; but instantly adds; *Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the Spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your Names are written in Heaven*[s]: because by a truly religious Frame of Mind, you are qualified for that Place, whither *shall in no wise enter any Thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh Abomination; but they, which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life*[t]. So perfect was his Regard to Truth and Virtue; that no Desire of gaining Disciples, no Tenderness to the Disciples he had, could ever incline him to give any one Person the least Exemption from the least Duty. And if such was their Case,

[r] Matth. xix. 17. [s] Luke x. 17—20. [t] Rev. xxi. 27.

never

never muſt we indulge Imaginations, that ours will be more favourable. Chriſtianity is not an artful Contrivance for conveying bad Men, who will make uſe of it, to Heaven, fraudulently; but it is *the Doctrine according to Godlineſs* *: And its Advantage is, not that a Chriſtian needs not be ſo good a Man as another, but that he hath the Means of being a better: which whoever fails to be, profeſſes it only to his Condemnation. *Know ye not*, ſaith the Apoſtle, *that they which run in a Race, run all; but one receiveth the Prize? So run, that ye may obtain* [u]. *And if a Man ſtrive for Maſteries; yet he is not crowned, except he ſtrive lawfully* [w]. Now there is one Law, peculiarly neceſſary to be obſerved, if ever we would obtain a Crown in the Chriſtian Combat; which yet many are ſtrangely prone to overlook, who would ſeem ſincerely deſirous to obſerve all the reſt: I mean, an humble Dependence on God's Mercy, procured by the Death of our bleſſed Lord; and on God's Aſſiſtance, promiſed in Return to our earneſt Prayers. Pardon is not a Debt, but a Favour; which the Giver may beſtow on his own Terms. Our Sufficiency for doing our Duty, is not from ourſelves, but from above;

* 1 Tim. vi. 3. [u] 1 Cor. ix. 24. [w] 2 Tim. ii. 5.

nor

nor can we have it, unless we ask it: and were we to obey much more perfectly, than we do; it would still be no more, than what we are bound to; and even were that otherwise, eternal Rewards cannot be due for temporary Services. Presumption in our own Strength is destructive to our Virtue; Confidence of our own Merit is injurious to our Maker: but a deep Sense of human Unworthiness and of divine Grace, will inspire us with that Lowliness of Heart which God will accept, and that Vigilance of Conduct which he will bless: *This* therefore *is the Victory, that overcometh the World, even our Faith* [x]. But besides all those who through blameable Mistakes thus fall into a wrong Way; Multitudes want Courage to set out, or Perseverance to continue, in what they know is the right Way. For every sinful Habit is to be thrown off at the Entrance; every virtuous Path, however rugged, pursued; every vicious one, however frequented and delightful, shunned, throughout the Progress: Thus *strait is the Gate*, and thus *narrow the Way that leadeth unto Life*. Numbers see their Duty, wish to perform it, and faintly *seek to enter in*; but not *striving* as they ought, fail in the Attempt. Perhaps they even do many Things

x 1 John v. 4.

well: and would do all, but for one favourite Indulgence, or another, which they cannot resolve to quit: so there they stop short, and are ruined for ever. Some Difficulties our very Nature produces; wrong Education many more; and when those of voluntary Custom are added, then the Opposition grows formidable indeed. But still our Saviour purposely gives full Warning of it; here in general Terms; but, through a good Part of the next Chapter, he specifies Particulars; shews, how many Things would render Men unworthy of *eating Bread in the Kingdom of God*[y]: and as great Multitudes were following him, turns and assures them, they must quit every Thing that was dearest, and bear every Thing that was hardest to them, when Conscience required it, if they meant to be his Disciples: bidding them therefore *sit down and count the Cost*; consider well, how they should be able to perform what he expected, before they undertook it[z]. Not that he intended to represent the *one Thing needful*[a], as a Matter of Indifference; that might be done or omitted, as Men should have a higher or lower Opinion of their own Strength: but, instead of drawing after him, by false Expectations, a Crowd of unthinking Admirers, that

[y] Luke xiv. 15. [z] Ver. 25—33. [a] Luke x. 42.

 would

would first dishonour, and then perhaps forsake him; he chose to tell them the worst plainly; and at once; that, as they could not but see the Importance of obeying God's Will, they might see and weigh its Difficulties too; and so, with deliberate and well-instructed Resolution, enter upon the Work; which however laborious, is indispensable.

They who have not been thus forewarned, go on indeed with great Ease; but it is not in Religion, that they go on. Doubtless common Decency, and outward Regularity, are very valuable Things: would God, more Attention were paid to them! But still with these there may be little true Sense of Duty, to God, or even Man; little Care, that the Heart and Affections be such as they ought; nay much Indulgence of very criminal Actions, either concealed from the World, or approved by it. In short, almost every Thing may be right, in the Opinion of those around us, perhaps in our own: and almost every Thing wrong in the Eyes of our Maker. How great is the Need then, that such as are proceeding securely in the broad Way, should be told the Difference of that which leads unto Life! But to others also, strong Representations, of the Purity of the divine Precepts, and of the Obstacles that

turn

turn Men aside from the Observance of them, are highly useful: they excite us to search into every Branch of our Conduct, every secret Recess of our Souls: they prevent the Negligence, that betrays us into Danger; and the Surprize, that disconcerts and dispirits us at the Appearance of it: they keep up our Vigilance, put us on exerting all our own Strength, and asking more from God: by which Means, Temptations, that else might have proved fatal, are intirely avoided, or easily overcome.

Timorous and dejected Minds indeed may be hurt, by insisting too much on the Trials, which they have to go through: to these therefore a different, but yet a consistent, View of Things must be presented: and accordingly our Saviour, with the utmost Tenderness, invites *all, that are weary and heavy laden, to come unto him, and they shall find Rest unto their Souls: his Yoke shall* prove *easy to them, and his Burthen light*[b]: in perfect Conformity to what had been prophesied of him, that *he should feed his Flock like a Shepherd; gather the Lambs with his Arm, and carry them in his Bosom*[c]. Religion hath both its Severities and its Encouragements: and the whole of both must be laid before Mankind; but the one or the other dwelt on,

[b] Matt. xi. 28, 29, 30. [c] If. xl. 11.

as

as the Case requires; that so, some may be alarmed into right Conduct, others quieted in it; and neither *the Heart of the Righteous made sad, whom God hath not made sad*; nor *the Hands of the Wicked strengthened, by promising him Life*[d]. But undoubtedly the principal Need is, of Mens being awakened to a Sense, that God requires much more, than is usually practised, or even thought of. For superfluous Fears, tho' we ought carefully to guard against them, are, of the two, not near so pernicious as deceitful Hopes. It is indeed a very awful Consideration that the Difficulties of becoming what we should be are so great; and surmounted by so few. But still the Truth ought not to be disguised: and the Difficulty of doing what may and must be done, is no Argument for any Thing but unwearied Diligence: and for that, it is the strongest Argument in the World. That most Men act wickedly, is no more an Objection against Religion; than that most Men act unwisely, is against common Prudence. That so many fail by taking a wrong Course, is only a Warning to make sure of taking the right. And if in that, several Duties are painful, it is not Christianity, that hath made them so. All

[d] Ezek. xiii. 22.

its peculiar Precepts are eaſy in themſelves, and Aſſiſtances to the Practice of the reſt. The hard Sayings are declared indeed in the Goſpel; but enjoined by Reaſon itſelf, when duly cultivated, and by the very Nature of Things. Theſe therefore are unchangeably what they are; and all we have to do, is to ſubmit to them. But if our Religion had made the Duties of Life ſtricter, it hath made the Hopes of Aſſiſtance and Reward ſo much ſtronger, that we ſhould have no manner of Cauſe to complain; much leſs to faint. The Temptations to diſobey, which ariſe from our Make and Circumſtances, God himſelf hath expoſed us to; and therefore if we apply to him, will aſſuredly ſupport us under, to a Degree that he will accept. The ill Habits which proceed from wrong Education only, cannot have got very ſtrong Hold; if we begin but to extirpate them, as ſoon as we come to the Government of ourſelves. And as for thoſe which, by our voluntary Miſconduct afterwards, have taken deeper Root; ſince the Miſchief is of our own doing, we are bound to more Pains and more Patience in undoing it again. When a long Irregularity hath impaired Health, a long Strictneſs of Regimen will

will be needful to recover it: but every Disease of the Soul is curable at length, though many of the Body are not. Indeed the severe Trials are almost wholly at first; and therefore our Saviour hath peculiarly remarked, that *strait is the Gate:* but when once we have contracted our Appetites and Passions enough, to get through that; the remaining Obstacles diminish, usually by quick Degrees; and after a while, *the Ways of Wisdom* become *Pleasantness; and all her Paths, Peace*[e]. Then the Difficulties themselves turn into Delight, and the happy Traveller goes on his Way rejoicing; till, the Days of his Pilgrimage being completed, *Entrance is ministered unto him abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*[f].

I conclude with the Words of a Heathen Writer; but highly deserving every Christian's Attention. "Think of the Life of Man, as "of a long Road, leading towards a holy "Temple where we are to be initiated in "Divine Mysteries: a Road full of Passengers, "some loitering and trifling, some running "about, and hindering one another; some "wandering, and losing themselves. For

[e] Prov. iii. 17. [f] 2 Pet. i. 11.

"many are the devious and deceitful Paths,
"leading to Pits and Precipices: but one
"alone, narrow and ſteep and rough and
"trodden by few, that points directly for-
"wards; which brave and induſtrious Souls,
"with great Reſolution, force their Way
"through; earneſtly longing for the Initia-
"tion, and captivated with the Beauty of the
"Place they aſpire to: where when they
"arrive, all their Labour ends, and every De-
"ſire is fully ſatisfied. Begin the Journey
"then: enter and be initiated; take Poſſeſſion
"of the good Things provided there: for
"Wiſhes themſelves can extend no farther[g]."

[g] *Max. Tyr.* Diſſert. 23. *Davis*, 4to. 39.

SERMON XII.

JAMES v. 12.

But above all Things, my Brethren, ſwear not; neither by Heaven, neither by the Earth, neither by any other Oath: but let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay; leſt ye fall into Condemnation.

THIS Precept of St. *James* is plainly taken from that Part of our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount, where juſt the ſame Prohibition occurs, only expreſſed more at large, in the following Words: *Ye have heard that it hath been ſaid by them of old Time, thou ſhalt not forſwear thyſelf, but ſhalt perform unto the Lord thine Oaths. But I ſay unto you, Swear not at all: neither by Heaven, for it is God's Throne; nor by the Earth, for it is his Footſtool; neither by* Jeruſalem, *for it is the City of the great King; neither ſhalt thou ſwear by thy Head; for thou canſt not make one Hair*

 white

white or black. But let your Communication be yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatſoever is more than theſe, cometh of Evil[a]. Theſe are the only Texts of Scripture, where we meet with any Command of this Kind. And therefore to underſtand aright, as it greatly concerns us, what the Chriſtian Doctrine is in relation to Oaths; our Buſineſs muſt be to conſider well, and compare together theſe two Paſſages. There is unqueſtionably a ſtrong Appearance at firſt Sight, that all Oaths without Exception are forbidden in them: and it is no Wonder, that many have been carried away by that Appearance, and held it unlawful to ſwear upon any Occaſion. But whoever will examine the Matter thoroughly, can hardly fail, I think, to be fully ſatisfied of the contrary.

That an Oath hath no Unlawfulneſs in its own Nature, needs very little Proof. For what is it? It is acknowledging ourſelves to ſtand in the Preſence of God, and have him for the Witneſs of what we ſay: it is declaring ourſelves to be ſenſible, that if we ſpeak falſely, we forfeit his Favour; and confeſſing, that we forfeit it juſtly. Now theſe are Truths,

[a] Matth. v. 33—37.

all

all of them highly honourable to God: and it cannot be ſinful, it is indeed an Act of Piety and Worſhip, to make a ſerious Profeſſion of them before him. And for the only Thing beſides, which an Oath is taken to imply, that we freely conſent to become Objects of his Anger, if we are not ſincere; it muſt evidently be limited to ſuch Conſent, as we are capable of giving, to what will equally follow, whether we conſent or not. We ſpeak in the ſame manner on common Occaſions perpetually; and tell thoſe, to whom we apply, that if ſuch or ſuch a Thing, which we ſay, be not true, we willingly renounce all Claim to their Friendſhip. The Expreſſion is univerſally underſtood, and uſed without Scruple, between Men: and it is juſt as intelligible, and allowable too, when addreſſed to God.

Oaths therefore, in themſelves, are certainly lawful: and farther, they are highly uſeful alſo. For Men are ſo extremely prone, both to conceal Truth, and to ſpeak Untruths, when their Paſſions, or their Intereſts, prompt them to do ſo; that they have Need of the moſt powerful Reſtraints to keep them from it; and thoſe to be inforced, in the moſt affecting

Manner, on their Consciences. Now undoubtedly the Thought, that God knows and will avenge it, if we transgress, may awaken and check Men, when nothing else can. And the most effectual Way of bringing that Thought strongly into our Minds, is requiring us to make a solemn Acknowledgment of it, as in his Presence. He is indeed equally present, and equally just, whether we invoke him or not. But it is our Sense of his Presence and Justice, that must influence us: and nothing can possibly either excite or testify that, so completely, as an Oath.

It must be owned, great Numbers will certainly speak Truth without an Oath; and too many will not speak it with one. But the Generality of Mankind are of a middle Sort: neither so virtuous, as to be safely trusted, in Cases of Importance, on their bare Word; nor yet so abandoned, as to violate a more solemn Engagement. Accordingly we find by Experience, that many will boldly say, what they will by no Means adventure to swear: and the Difference, which they make between these two Things, is often indeed much greater, than they should; but still it shews the Need of insisting on the strongest Security. When

once

once Men are under that awful Tie, and as the Scripture Phrase is, *have bound their Souls with a Bond*[b], it composes their Passions, counterbalances their Prejudices and Interests, makes them mindful of what they promise, and careful what they assert; puts them upon Exactness in every Circumstance: and Circumstances are often very material Things. Even the Good might be too negligent, and the Bad would frequently have no Concern at all, about their Words; if it were not for the Solemnity of this religious Act. And a farther Advantage of it is, that when we have thus had the strongest Assurances given us, which we can have, concerning any Matter, we are naturally disposed to acquiesce in it: and *an Oath for Confirmation* becomes *the End of all Strife*[c].

This Practice therefore is of so great Consequence, that human Society would scarce be kept in tolerable Order by any other Means. Perhaps indeed a small Community, of which every Member scrupled taking an Oath, may, by strict Discipline, subsist for some Time without it: and a small Sect of such Persons in the Midst of a larger Community, may, under due Limitations, be safely excused from it also,

[b] Numb. xxx. 2. [c] Heb. vi. 16.

whilst

whilſt they continue ſufficiently diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of the World; and whilſt the Value, which they ſet on this Indulgence, makes them fearful of doing any Thing to forfeit it. But were ſuch a Permiſſion to become general throughout a large Nation, eſpecially one enjoying Wealth and Commerce and Liberty; were all the different Sorts of Perſons in it to be releaſed at once from what they all looked on as their ſtrongeſt Obligation to Truth; it is eaſy to ſee, that univerſal Confuſion muſt inevitably follow. And there is not any Age, or Nation of the World, but have ſhewn, that they were ſenſible of this. All Governments have ever required the moſt highly eſteemed of their Subjects, on every fit Occaſion, to confirm their Teſtimony by an Appeal to God: for if it is not demanded of every one who is able to give it with a good Conſcience, how can it be expected of any?

Not only amongſt the Heathens therefore, but amongſt the holy Patriarchs alſo, from early Times, good Men have aſked, and equally good Men have given, the Security of an Oath. God himſelf is repreſented in Scripture as ſwearing to Men: and Men are not only introduced ſwearing to God; *I have ſworn, and am ſtedfaſtly purpoſed to keep thy Commandments*[d];

[d] Pſ. cxix. 106.

but

but in the Law of *Moses*, they are expresly commanded to *swear by his Name* to one another[e]. Cases are specified, in which *the Oath of the Lord shall be between them*[f]: and it is appointed, that if any Man *hear the Voice of swearing*, that is, have the Form of an Oath pronounced to him, as called to be *a Witness*, by the Magistrate; if he doth not utter upon that Oath, what *he hath seen or known* of the Matter, *he shall bear his Iniquity*[g]. Nor do the Prophets, though they sometimes improve upon the Law, and carry Things to a higher Degree of Purity and Strictness, ever mention Oaths, but with Honour; provided Men *swear* as *Jeremiah* directs, *in Truth, in Judgment, and in Righteousness*[h]. And far from intimating that under the Messiah this Act of Religion would become unlawful; they foretell, in Passages, which must be understood of the Gospel Times, that then *unto God every Knee shall bow, and every Tongue shall swear*[i].

But as all Things are liable to Abuse, and few Things in Religion have escaped it; great Abuses in the Matter of Oaths had prevailed amongst the *Jews*, before our Saviour's Days.

e Deut. x. 20. f Exod. xxii. 11. g Lev. v. 1.
h Jer. iv. 2. i If. xlv. 23. See also xix. 18. and lxv. 16.

Prompted by wicked Motives to interpret away the Obligation of the third Commandment, as far as they could, ſome of them pretended that ſwearing to a vain Thing meant only ſwearing to a falſe one; and therefore made no Scruple at all of needleſs Oaths, if they were but true ones. Others, becauſe it was only ſaid, *Thou ſhalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain*, thought it very lawful, ſo they did not uſe that Name expreſsly, to ſwear when they would, by other Forms, however equivalent[k]. And upon this Imagination a yet worſe was grafted; that ſuch Oaths, not being of the Sort, to which alone the Law related, they were liable to no Puniſhment for breaking them, nor conſequently obliged to keep them[l]. For theſe Notions we find in their Writings, preſerved to this Day. Indeed our Saviour informs us, that in his Time they did not conceive all ſuch Oaths to be void, but ſome only. If a Man *ſwore by the Altar, it was nothing:* if *by the Gift*

[k] *Philo* περι των εν ειδει νομων. *Lightf.* in *Matth.* v. Amongſt the Heathens, *Rhadamanthus* firſt forbad ſwearing by the Gods, and directed them to ſwear by the Gooſe, and the Dog, the Ram, and the like. *Socrat.* l. 12. *rerum Creticarum in Schol. Ariſtoph.* in *Av.* which *Euſtath.* in *Od.* Γ. p. 1871. *Ed. Rom.* ſaith he did υπερ τȣ μη θεων ονομαζειν επι πασιν. And *Porphyry de Abſt.* l. 3. p. 285. ſaith *Socrates* followed this Law of *Rhadamanthus*. *Socrates* ſaith in *Plato*'s *Gorgias*, Μα τον κυνα, τον Αιγυπτιων θεον. *Jabl. Panth. Æg.* l. 5. c. 1. §. 5.

[l] *Lightf.* in Matth. v.

upon

upon it, that was binding. And other like Diſtinctions without a Difference they had; by which the artful could entangle others, and keep themſelves free[m].

Such then being the Advantages of Oaths, and ſuch the *Jewiſh* Perverſions of them; which is it likely, that our bleſſed Lord intended to forbid; the total Uſe, or the Abuſe only? Is it credible in the leaſt, that he, *whoſe Kingdom is not of this World*[n], ſhould mean to take away from all the Governments of this World, a Right, which they had enjoyed from the Creation to that Day? Can it be imagined, that the greateſt Lover of Mankind, that ever was, would looſe the firmeſt Bonds of human Society; and make it a Part of his Reformation of Things, to forbid our acknowledging ourſelves to ſpeak in the Preſence of God, and to incur his Diſpleaſure, if we ſpeak falſely? Certainly this was not his Intention, if his Words can poſſibly ſignify any Thing elſe: and I ſhall proceed to ſhew you, that they naturally may; indeed, that they muſt.

It is true, the Prohibition is at firſt View abſolute and general: but ſo are many others in

[m] Matth. xxiii. 16—22. See *Wolf.* Matth. v. 35. [n] John xviii. 36.

Scripture,

Scripture, and particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, which yet every one allows to have their Limitations in the Nature of the Thing. The very next Prohibition after this, is juſt as general: *But I ſay unto you, that ye reſiſt not Evil*[o]. Yet on ſome Occaſions, and in ſome Ways, we all do and ought to reſiſt it. Another in the next Chapter is, *Take therefore no Thought for the Morrow*[p]. And a third immediately follows, *Judge not, that ye be not judged*[q]. Here all the World underſtands our Saviour to ſpeak only of needleſs Thought and raſh Judgment. And why then ſhould not we underſtand him to ſpeak of needleſs and raſh Swearing; and apprehend, that he choſe ſuch comprehenſive Terms on all theſe Subjects, becauſe there was much Occaſion to warn Men ſtrongly; and in Compariſon little Danger of their failing to make proper Exceptions? There is full as much Ground in the Reaſon of the Caſe, to think thus of the Point before us, as of the reſt: and there is farther Ground from his Words themſelves; for they are viſibly pointed againſt the *Jewiſh* Evaſions, which I have juſt mentioned to you. Some of them imagined, they could not ſin by other than

o Matth. v. 39. p Matth. vi. 34. q Matth. vii. 1.

false Swearing. He therefore tells them, that Swearing at all was a Sin; meaning, where they could avoid it: but Swearing before a Magistrate they could not avoid. Some again thought, if God was not named, the Oath was harmless. He therefore shews them, that their other common Forms were of the same Nature, as if they did name him: for they all referred to him; *Heaven was his Throne, Earth his Foot-stool, Jerusalem his City*; their *Heads* and Lives were preserved by his Power, not their own[r]. So that swearing by such Things, indeed by any Thing, is in effect swearing by God himself: (For *the World is the Lord's, and the Fulness thereof*[s]:) and bringing any Part of it into the Form of an Oath, can have no other Sense, than appealing to him, as the Disposer of that, and the whole. Now from hence again our Saviour appears not to condemn Swearing before an Officer of Justice; for on such an Occasion these Forms were never admitted. And what he doth condemn, the Words following his Prohibition, joined with it, as they ought, shew plainly enough. *Swear not at all: but let your Communication be, yea, yea; nay, nay. Communication*, here and elsewhere, means, Dis-

[r] Matth. v. 34, 35, 36. [s] Psal. l. 12.

course

course with one another: as when St. *Paul* directs, *Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth* [t]. The original Word, as well as the *English*, is the same in both Places, and confessedly denotes this. Oaths in common Talk therefore are the Thing, which our blessed Lord intended to forbid, and nothing else. Had he designed to prohibit more, he would have said, "Swear not all, but let your Answer, even though a Magistrate require an "Oath of you, be only yea, yea; and nay, "nay." But when he saith only, *Swear not at all, but let your Communication*, your usual Discourse consist of naked Assertions, and no more; we cannot reasonably extend the first Part of his Precept beyond the latter; but must understand the Case, in which we are forbidden Swearing, to be the same with that in which we are confined to bare affirming or denying: which is our daily familiar Speech. And a farther Confirmation of this, if it needs one, follows in what he adds: *For whatsoever is more than these cometh of Evil.* Now common Swearing can indeed come only of Evil. But taking a solemn Oath, on Affairs of Moment, may come, and often doth, from Reverence of our Maker, from Desire

[t] Eph. iv. 29.

of

of maintaining Peace and Justice amongst our Fellow-creatures: and actually maintains them in a better Degree, than could be done without it.

Our Saviour's Words then sufficiently interpret themselves: and they interpret those of the Text by necessary Consequence. For if he intended only to prohibit common swearing in Conversation, St. *James*, we may be sure, intended no more, than his Master did; especially in Words, that are evidently copied from his Master's. If they are without Dependence on what comes before and after, we have no other Rule to explain them by. And if they are connected with it, the Connexion leads us to the same Sense. In the 8th Verse he exhorts to Patience under Afflictions. In the 9th he cautions against one common Mark of wanting it, envying the more prosperous: *Grudge not one against another, Brethren, lest ye be condemned.* Then after setting before them Examples of Patience, in the 10th and 11th; he proceeds, in the 12th, to warn them of another Fault, which Impatience too frequently produces: *But above all Things, my Brethren, swear not:* have a peculiar Care, that your Sufferings and Injuries tempt you not to a passionate and profane Use

of the Name of God: nay, *Swear not by Heaven, or by Earth, or by any other Oath:* do not imagine, that softening and mincing your Imprecations will change the Nature of them: *but let your yea, be yea; and your nay, nay:* let your Assertions and Denials, under the greatest Provocations, be mere Assertions and Denials, without any superadded Vehemence of Phrase: *lest you fall into Condemnation* for irreligious Expressions of Warmth, as others will for uncharitable repining. We have therefore no manner of Reason to think, that St. *James* disapproved swearing before a Magistrate, to which his Prohibition of swearing by Heaven and Earth cannot possibly relate; or even swearing on any other solemn and needful Occasion: but only such Oaths, as are apt to break out in common Speech, especially from Persons under Oppression.

And it is very material to observe farther, that the more serious and strict of the *Jewish* Teachers themselves forbid swearing in the same general Terms, with our Saviour and St. *James*. But when they say, as more than one of them doth, that "it is good for a Man not "to swear at all;" do they mean, that it is good for him not to swear in Cases, where their

their own Law requires that he ſhall ſwear? Nay *Solomon* himſelf mentions the Character of him *that ſweareth*, as a blameable one: and of him *that feareth an Oath*, as a commendable one [u]. Doth he mean to contradict *Moſes*, whoſe Law was then in force, and to ſay no Man ſhould take an Oath on any Exigence whatever? No certainly: but that he ought to avoid it, whenever, conſiſtently with other Obligations, it can be avoided. Nay, the Heathen Moraliſts alſo, at one Time ſeem to prohibit ſwearing abſolutely; and at another interpret their Intention to be, that an Oath ſhould be uſed very ſparingly [w]. In ſhort, their Words, and our Saviour's too, were meant and taken in exactly the ſame Manner, as ours are at preſent, when at any Time we direct a Child, or a Servant, that they muſt be ſure never to ſwear. And there is a moſt remarkable Inſtance, in the *Jewiſh* Hiſtorian *Joſephus* [x], of the Neceſſity of interpreting this Rule with ſome Exceptions; though it be laid down in as abſolute and ſtrong Terms, as well can be. The *Eſſenes*, a Sect of that Nation, he tells us, had ſo great an Abhorrence of ſwearing, that they looked upon

u Eccl. ix. 2. w See the Beginning of Serm. 15.
x B. J. l. 2. c. 8. §. 6, 7. p. 162, 163. Ed. *Haverc.*

taking an Oath, even as a worſe Crime than breaking it. And yet theſe very Perſons, he informs us but a few Lines after, were obliged on their Admiſſion into that Sect, to take a moſt ſolemn Oath. And therefore in Reality they could condemn only needleſs ones, however generally they might ſpeak, to guard againſt them the better.

But we have ſtill further Evidence, that ſome Oaths remained, after our Saviour's Prohibition, as lawful as before. He himſelf, our faultleſs Pattern, made uſe of them. When *the High Prieſt adjured him by the living God*, to ſay, *if he were the Chriſt, the Son of the Bleſſed*; he affirmed upon Oath, that he was [y]. For, according to the *Jewiſh* Manner of ſwearing in their Courts of Juſtice, the Magiſtrate, as I have already obſerved to you, pronounced the Form of the Oath; and then the Perſon, brought before him, was underſtood to ſpeak under the Obligation of it. Now to all the Queſtions of the High Prieſt before, our bleſſed Lord had returned no Anſwer: but to this, which he would have anſwered leaſt of all, if judicial Oaths had been contrary to his own Precepts, he anſwers immediately. Nay, we

[y] Matth. xxvi. 63, 64. Mark xiv. 61, 62.

find

find him uttering a solemn Oath, even where the Magistrate's Authority was not interposed: *Verily I say unto you*, we translate it, *there shall be no Sign given*; but the Original is, *if there shall be a Sign given, to this Generation*[z]: which, the Learned well know, is only an Abridgment of the common Phrase, "*The Lord do so to me,* "*and more also, if*[a] this be not true." But, lest any one should alledge, though without a Shadow of Reason, that our Saviour might exempt himself from what he bound his Disciples to; observe farther, that one of the most eminent of them, St. *Paul*, hath in several of his Epistles made use of one Form or another of swearing, on Occasions, which he saw were proper: *God is my Witness*[b]: *I call God for a Record upon my Soul*[c]: *These Things, which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not*[d]. And which is yet more, he writes to the *Thessalonians* thus: *I adjure you by the Lord*, (for the marginal Translation is the right one) I lay you under the Tie of an Oath, *that this Epistle be read to all the holy Brethren*[e]. Now is it possible, that he should understand so little, or observe so ill, the Rules of that Gospel, which he

[z] Mark viii. 12. [a] Ruth i. 17. 2 Sam. iii. 35. xix. 13. [b] Rom. i. 9. [c] 2 Cor. i. 23. [d] Gal. i. 20. [e] 1 Thess. v. 27. Ὁρκίζω ὑμᾶς.

had learnt from Christ himself by Revelation, and received an extraordinary Commission of Apostleship to teach, as both to do himself, and oblige others to do, what Christ had forbidden; and even be guilty of it in those very Writings, which make Part of God's Word? Or is not his Practice, in these Circumstances, an abundantly sufficient Commentary on our Saviour's Doctrine? We have, besides this, if it were wanted, the Testimony of *Clement* of *Alexandria*[f], a Writer of the second Century, that St. *John* gave an Assurance upon Oath to a young Man, whose unhappy Case he apprehended to need it.

What the Practice of Christians in the two succeeding Ages was, is neither so material, nor quite certain. Some of them perhaps might think that our Saviour had absolutely condemned all swearing[g]. Others like him might speak against it strongly in general: and yet like him allow of Exceptions. But no Wonder, if they were seldom willing to swear before Heathen Magistrates, because they must usually have sworn by Heathen Gods. And therefore *Ter-*

[f] Lib. Quis dives salvabitur & ap. *Euseb.* H. E. l. 3. c. 23. Ο δ' εγγυωμενος, επομνυμενος, ως αφεσιν ευρη [σι.] ται. κ. τ. λ.

[g] *Basilides*, when newly turned Christian, and required by his Fellow-soldiers to take an Oath, μη εξειναι αυτω παραπαν ομνυναι διαβεβαιετο· χριστιανον γαρ υπαρχειν. *Euseb.* H. E. l. 6. c. 5.

tullian,

tullian, who alſo lived in the ſecond Century, acquainted the Emperors in his Apology[h], what Sort of Oaths a Believer in Chriſt could take; and what he could not. But as ſoon as ever Chriſtianity was eſtabliſhed, Magiſtrates required this Security, and Subjects gave it, juſt as freely as had been done among the *Jews* before.

All theſe Conſiderations unite in ſhewing, that the Words of our Saviour and St. *James* relate only to ſwearing, without Neceſſity, in Diſcourſe. But indeed were there much leſs to favour this Limitation, yet while the State of the World continues ſuch as it is; if Queſtions of Importance ariſe, as they often do, which cannot be decided as they ought, without our Teſtimony, and the Magiſtrates will accept no Teſtimony, except upon Oath; how muſt we act? Muſt we ſtand by, and ſee Falſehood and Wickedneſs triumph, and the Fortunes and Lives of Men taken away unjuſtly, rather than do a Thing, confeſſedly lawful in itſelf, to prevent it? Or ought we not in ſuch a Caſe to follow the Direction, *I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice*[i]; prefer the moral and unchangeable Duty of ſupporting Truth and Right, before

[h] C. 32. Sed & juramus, ſicut non per Genios Cæſarum, ſic per ſalutem eorum, quæ auguſtior eſt omnibus Geniis.
[i] Hoſ. vi. 6. Matth. ix. 13. xii. 7.

the poſitive and mutable one, if it were one, of abſtaining from an Oath?

But the Caſe of Oaths not impoſed by the Magiſtrate, is very different. And we ought to be extremely cautious about them, and manifeſt a ſtrong Reluctance to take them. It is true, our Saviour's Prohibition is only of ſwearing in common Diſcourſe: and what we deliberately aſſert on Occurrences of more than ordinary Moment, is of a Nature very ſuperior to common Diſcourſe: for which Reaſon, and eſpecially ſince he and his Apoſtles did on ſuch Occaſions make uſe of Oaths, it is not always unlawful for us to do ſo too. But it is much more expedient and prudent; it ſhews a far higher Reverence of the Name of God, and a more pious Fear of tranſgreſſing; it is keeping ourſelves from the Appearance, from the Borders of Evil; from becoming guilty inſenſibly, and then more and more guilty; reſolutely to avoid ſuch Oaths, whenever we poſſibly can: and moſt Men may avoid them intirely. It happens exceedingly ſeldom, to very few of us, that our Sincerity cannot be ſufficiently evidenced, if we will, by other Methods of making it believed, that will appear abundantly worthy of Credit; without the awful Solemnity of an Appeal

Appeal to God; which ought to be ſacredly reſerved for Emergencies of uncommon Neceſſity.

Thus I have endeavoured to ſhew you, how far Oaths are lawful. And the Subject is material enough to be thus enlarged on, were it only for the three following Reaſons: that Chriſtianity may not lie under the Imputation, for a heavy one it would be, of cenſuring as criminal, what the Welfare of Society makes indiſpenſable: that the whole Body of its Profeſſors may not be accuſed of authorizing the Tranſgreſſions of one of its fundamental Precepts: and that none of you in particular, if at any Time called to give your Teſtimony in a legal Manner, may do it with a Conſcience doubtful, whether you do well or ill: *for whatſoever is not of Faith, is Sin* [k]. But a fourth Uſe may be, to lay open the Error of ſome, who imagine themſelves led more immediately, than others, by the Spirit of God within them: but indeed are led, in this Matter at leaſt, by miſtaken Appearances, to condemn what Scripture hath not condemned, and the Good of Mankind requires to be practiſed. Only you will remember, that though the Conſequences of their Opinion, were it to prevail, would be extremely hurtful; yet they cannot intend

[k] Rom. xiv. 23.

thoſe

those Consequences: for that would be intending Harm to themselves, as well as others.

There is yet one more, and a very serious Use, to be made of the Doctrine you have heard: that if the Bond of an Oath, on fit Occasions, be of such Importance to Society; since an awful Regard to God is what gives to all Oaths their whole Force and Efficacy, that Regard should be cultivated with the utmost Care; whatever may lessen it, discountenanced; whatever may augment it, encouraged: else, besides losing all the Direction and the Comfort, which Religion gives to well-disposed Persons; all the Restraint, which it lays on others, will be lost too: and the Dread of an Almighty Avenger being taken away, the most sacred of Obligations will become no better, than a more effectual Means of committing Injustice. Human Laws will soon prove too weak, when those of Heaven are cast off: *every one will do what is right in his own Eyes*[l], and every Man's Hand be against his Brother. Therefore diligently preserve the Reverence of God strong upon your own Hearts, and the Hearts of all who belong to you: for *the Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom; a good Understanding have they, that do thereafter: the Praise of it endureth for ever*[m].

[l] Judges xvii. 6. xxi. 25.

[m] Psal. cxi. 10.

SER-

SERMON XIII.

EXOD. xx. 7.

Thou ſhalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltleſs, that taketh his Name in vain.

HAVING already ſhewn, that the Chriſtian Religion hath not forbidden the Uſe of all Oaths: it is natural to conſider diſtinctly, in the next Place, thoſe Kinds of Oaths, which are forbidden. And I have choſen to ſpeak of this Matter from the third Commandment: which would have been of very ſmall Significancy under the Goſpel, as it only prohibits ſwearing in vain, if our Saviour, by a ſubſequent Law, had prohibited ſwearing at all. But as you have now ſeen that he doth not, it ſtill continues to be of the ſame Force and Weight, as when it was delivered at firſt, from the Mouth of God himſelf, with that awful Solemnity, which you may read in the Chapter before

before the Text: when *the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai in Fire; with Thunders and Lightnings, and the Voice of a Trumpet exceeding loud, and the Smoke thereof ascended as the Smoke of a Furnace, and the whole Mountain quaked greatly*[a]. *And the Lord spake with a great Voice, unto all the Assembly out of the Midst of the Fire, of the Cloud and of the thick Darkness, these Words*[b], which I have laid before you.

Precepts, delivered in such a Manner, we may be sure God will expect us to obey with more than ordinary Care: and therefore we are deeply concerned to acquaint ourselves with the Import and Extent of them. Now the Words of this Commandment are very comprehensive. For, as *Vanity* signifies in Scripture Language, both what hath no Being; and what is of no Importance, and therefore is considered as if it had no Being; so applying the Name of God *to Vanity*, (which is the most literal Translation of the Words rendered, *taking it in vain*) signifies of Consequence giving Testimony upon Oath, either to what is not, or to what in Comparison is nothing: that is, either to Falsehoods, or to Trifles. Undoubtedly swearing to Falsehoods is the

[a] Exod. xix. 16, 18. [b] Deut. v. 22.

chief

chief Thing forbidden here; and by some hath been thought the only one. But as the Words of the Prohibition fairly comprehend swearing to trifles also; and as the oldest Translations, and most learned of the *Jewish* Writers have understood them to comprehend it; and especially, as our Saviour hath established this Latitude of the Phrase by his own Interpretation of it: we are certainly to consider them, as taking in both Senses. I shall therefore treat of this Commandment first as forbidding false Oaths; and afterwards, as forbidding needless and common ones.

Now Oaths are of two Sorts: either such, as affirm or deny somewhat concerning past or present Matters, and are called assertory: or such, as engage and give Assurance concerning Time to come, and are called promissory. To begin with the former.

If ever we assert any Thing upon Oath, which we know or believe to be false: if we deny any Thing, which we know or believe to be true: if we either affirm, or deny, in Matters, of which we know nothing: or if, in Matters, of which we do know something, we speak beyond our Knowledge; declaring ourselves to be certain of what we only believe; or

or to believe firmly what we only ſuſpect and gueſs: every one of theſe Things, in its different Degree, is profaning the Name of God to atteſt a Falſehood. And farther, if, when we are ſworn to tell the whole Truth, we conceal deſignedly any Part of it, which we think may be of Moment; here again we are guilty of breaking our Oath. Nay indeed, though we are not ſworn to tell the whole, yet we ſhould obſerve, that the only Reaſon of giving Evidence at all is, that Right may be done; and ſuppreſſing a Truth may ſometimes as intirely miſlead and deceive, as telling the groſſeſt Falſehood. In ſhort then, if we uſe any Method whatever, be it aggravating, or be it palliating, to diſguiſe the real State of the Caſe: if we relate it in any other Manner whatever, than the faireſt and plaineſt we can, after diligently recollecting and conſidering well: every ſuch Artifice amounts to a Violation of this great Law of God.

And if Witneſſes ought to obſerve ſuch Impartiality; you will eaſily apprehend, that Jurymen and Judges are at leaſt equally bound to it: for they are not only upon Oath too, but appointed, and intruſted by public Authority: and if any Thing influences them, but a ſteady Regard

Regard to Truth; what ſhould be the Security of Juſtice, becomes an Inſtrument of Oppreſſion: *Judgment*, as the Scripture expreſſes it, *is turned into Gall; and the Fruit of Righteouſneſs into Hemlock*[e]. Indeed whoever hath ſworn to ſpeak and determine uprightly, and permits himſelf to be any Way biaſſed; though he ſhould happen to do right, yet ſince he was diſpoſed to have done the ſame Thing, though it had been wrong; is perjured in his Intention, though in the particular Fact he may not.

And greatly akin to the Guilt of being perjured ourſelves, nay often as bad, and ſometimes worſe, if poſſible, is that of inducing others to be perjured: a Sin which is committed, not only by direct hiring of them to ſwear Falſehoods; but by awing and intimidating; by courting and flattering; by intimating Advantages to them, if they can truly ſwear ſo and ſo; by talking them into a Perſuaſion of what they were not fully perſuaded of before; and thus making them ſtrain hard to believe, that they know or remember more or leſs, than they do. Another Way, and a very wicked one, of making Witneſſes forſwear themſelves is, when artful Men contrive, that they ſhall uſe Forms

[e] Amos vi. 12.

of

of Words, of which they do not throughly understand the Import: or disconcert them so, on their Appearance in a Court of Justice, by improper Treatment of them; and astonish and confound them in such a Manner, by a Multiplicity of captious Questions; that they hinder them from speaking the Truth which they intended, or drive them into saying Falsehoods which they did not intend.

And if it be sinful, by any such Methods, to make Witnesses bear false Testimony: it cannot be innocent, by unfair Suggestions, and false Colours put on Facts or Laws, to procure a wrong Verdict or Sentence. Let any one suppose himself a Sufferer by unjust Representations of a Case, and he will strongly feel, how bad they are. Surely then he cannot indeed think them allowable, merely because he is a Gainer by them.

It is very true, that in all these Matters, which I have mentioned, sometimes Interest, sometimes Prepossession, blinds People to a strange Degree. But therefore it is their Duty, and should be their Business, to watch themselves: for no Inducement whatever can justify speaking or acting against Truth. Be it Affection ever so well-grounded, be it Resentment ever so just, be it Zeal for a Party, civil or religi-

ous,

ous, which we think it ever ſo needful to ſupport; be it Reſpect for the Great and Powerful, Compaſſion for the Poor and Diſtreſſed; be it in a Word, what it will, that turns Men aſide in Judgment from Juſtice and Equity; he who teſtifies or determines on ſuch Motives teſtifies or determines againſt his Oath. And becauſe Men are often influenced by theſe Things, without ſeeing it diſtinctly; whoever is called upon to bear any Part in judicial Affairs, ought to examine himſelf beforehand with due Care; and purify his Heart from whatever diſpoſitions may corrupt his Integrity.

But there are ſome Occaſions, on which Doing ſo is peculiarly requiſite. If, for Inſtance, a Caſe, depending at preſent, may be likely to prove our own Caſe hereafter, or even appears to have any Connexion with it: we are ſtrongly tempted to incline a little, perhaps more than a little, to the Side, that makes for us; and imagine, there cannot be much Harm in that: whilſt yet we hold thoſe in the utmoſt Abhorrence, who are but equally partial on the other Side. And if we have any Motive, that looks of a more generous Kind; if it may promote a good Cauſe, if it may ſerve a Friend, or a Neighbour, if it may relieve in what ſeems a hard Caſe; then we are apt to

think it meritorious to tranſgreſs. But indeed no Cauſe is ſo good, as that of a conſtant Adherence to Truth and Right: and if we depart from it, for what we imagine a valuable end; we teach and provoke others to depart from it, for what they imagine ſuch: and God knows then, who may prove the greateſt Sufferers at laſt. As for the Plea of good Nature on theſe Occaſions; it is never a true good Nature. For, in all Trials of Property, ſhewing any undue Favour to one Side, is doing juſt ſo much Hardſhip to the oppoſite: and in all Trials for Crimes, whatever is unfairly done for the Advantage of the Perſon accuſed, is done equally to the Diſadvantage of public Order and Safety. And though poſſibly both ſome Caſes and Laws, may ſeem and be hard ones; yet this is the Concern of the legiſlative and regal Authority, not ours: and though it be very laudable to obtain, if we can by proper Means, a Mitigation of the Sentence, and even a Change of the Law itſelf, when it is requiſite; we can never be at Liberty, while it continues in Force, to elude and defeat it, by falſe Evidence or wrong Determinations. If we were, every one's Fancy would ſoon become the Rule of his whole Behaviour.

There

There is indeed one Thing, that looks a little plausible, urged in Favour of such Practices; but it may be urged, as well, for almost any Sort of Dishonesty in the World: that if we scruple a small Matter of Unfairness, our Adversaries will not; and if they take all Advantages, we must too; else we are not upon even Ground. But in general, Sincerity and Integrity, with a moderate Share of Prudence, will do more than set us on even Ground. *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely*[d]. His Method of acting will be consistent, his Character will be his Advocate and Evidence: whilst artful Knavery will only entangle and discredit itself. But when this proves otherwise, as it sometimes may; our true Wisdom is, to be content it should: to support ourselves with the Testimony of a good Conscience; and look forward to the approaching Hour, when it shall be amply rewarded.

Such then is our Duty with respect to Oaths, in every Part of judicial Proceedings: and performing it faithfully is a Matter of such unspeakable Importance, to the Fortunes, the Reputations, the Liberties, the Lives of Men, that all Ages and Nations have shewn a strong Sense of it, and made Provision accordingly.

[d] Prov. x. 9.

The *Jewiſh* Law hath expreſsly directed: *If a falſe Witneſs riſe up againſt any Man, to teſtify againſt him that which is wrong: then ſhall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his Brother, and thine Eye ſhall not pity*[e]. The Laws of ſome other Countries indeed have not gone ſo far: yet the mildeſt have ſhewn a Deteſtation, both of perjured Evidences and perjured Judges. And however Penalties, enacted by Men, may be avoided; the Judgments denounced by God cannot: whoſe Word hath declared: *A falſe Witneſs ſhall not be unpuniſhed; and he that ſpeaketh Lies, ſhall not eſcape*[f]. *Wo unto them, that juſtify the Wicked for Reward; and take away the Righteouſneſs of the Righteous from him*[g]. *He that juſtifieth the Wicked, and he that condemneth the Juſt, even they both are an Abomination to the Lord*[h].

If indeed Men give falſe Evidence without deſigning it, through unavoidable Miſtake or Forgetfulneſs; they deſerve Compaſſion, and not Cenſure. And if they ſhould fail a little in the due Care of recollecting; or even ſhould be a little warped by unperceived Prejudices: this, though highly blamable, falls very ſhort of deliberate Perjury. And the more dreadful

e Deut. xix. 16, 19, 21. f Prov. xix. 5. g Iſ. v. 21, 23. h Prov. xvii. 15.

that

that Crime is, the more cautious we ſhould be, not only of committing it ourſelves, but of imputing it raſhly to our Neighbours. Let us therefore ſo judge one another, as remembering, that God will judge us all.

I ſhall only add, under this Head, that Aſſertions upon Oath, which are not before a Magiſtrate, but in a private Way between two Parties, though there is very ſeldom Occaſion for them, yet whenever we do make them, require, as much as others, the ſtricteſt Veracity: and will ſubject us to equal Puniſhment, though not from our Fellow-creatures, yet from our Maker, if we employ them to miſlead thoſe, whom we profeſs to inform.

The ſecond Sort of Oaths, mentioned in the Beginning, are promiſſory ones: by which we give Aſſurance of our doing, or abſtaining from, ſuch and ſuch Things hereafter. Now theſe again are ſcarce ever needful, and conſequently ſcarce ever allowable; excepting where the Law of God or Man preſcribes them. But when they are taken, their Obligation is not at all the leſs for their being taken unneceſſarily. And therefore let us inquire how far it extends. In the firſt Place then, Men forſwear themſelves, whenever they ſwear to do any Thing, which they

know they cannot do; as for Inſtance, to execute an Office, for which they are ſenſible they have not Abilities or Leiſure. Indeed, if they only believe they cannot, or have no ſufficient Reaſon to think they can, and yet abſolutely and unconditionally ſwear, that they will, their Oath is plainly deceitful; and may occaſion pernicious Diſappointments in the Affairs, with which, on the Credit of it, they are intruſted. Nor doth it acquit them, if unexpectedly they ſhould afterwards prove able to do, what they thought at the Time they were not: as on the other Hand, it doth not make Men guilty, if they ſhould not prove able to do, what they had Grounds to think they were: for in every Thing human, Allowance is made of Courſe for ſome Degree of Uncertainty; and therefore needs not always be expreſſed. Again, if we promiſe any Thing upon Oath, which tho' we can do, we do not firmly intend to do, this is very groſs Perjury: for our own Intentions we could not but know; and therefore it is wilful Wickedneſs to ſwear contrary to them. Nay laſtly, how well ſoever we might once intend; if we are wanting at any Time afterwards in due Care to make our Promiſe good; we violate our Engagement. For we give Aſſurance,

ſurance, not only of our preſent Purpoſe, but of our future Endeavours too: and therefore of our actual Performance, if we have it in our Power. So far as indeed we have not, our Obligation ceaſes; or rather, is ſuſpended, whilſt the Incapacity continues. For if ever we become able to do, what before we were not; and the Circumſtances of the Caſe remain at all the ſame, as when we obliged ourſelves; undoubtedly we are ſtill obliged.

But ſuppoſe we have ſworn to do a Thing, which is within our Power, but contrary to our Duty: what is incumbent on us then? Why, certainly taking ſuch an Oath, knowing or even ſuſpecting it to be ſuch, was a great Sin. But performing it, inſtead of atoning for that Sin, would only add a ſecond, and perhaps, in ſome Reſpects, a greater, to it. We have promiſed what we had no Right to promiſe, and a prior Engagement to obſerve the Laws of God, renders this void from the Beginning. But then, if only ſome Part or Circumſtance of it, be unlawful; we are firmly bound to perform the Reſt: indeed to come as near the whole, as, conſiſtently with other Duties, we can: and make as good Amends, as we are able, to thoſe, who may innocently ſuffer by our Failure.

You will easily apprehend from this, that if we have promised any Thing upon Oath, which we can do lawfully; but cannot do without forfeiting some considerable Advantage, or undergoing some considerable Expence or Loss: we are by no Means absolved from it on that Account. For it is a known Part of the Character of the Man, *who shall dwell in the Tabernacle of the Lord, and rest upon his holy Hill*; that *he sweareth to his Neighbour, and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own Hindrance*[i]. If indeed we were not of sufficient Understanding, when we made the Promise; if we were deceived or mistaken in any Thing essential to it; if it was not originally intended to bind us in Circumstances, like those which have happened since, though perhaps they were not particularly excepted beforehand: if any one of these Things be undeniably true, we are not bound. Again, if the Person, to whom we have engaged ourselves, release us; or if, where we cannot expect an express Notification that he doth, there be full Reason to presume it; then also we are at Liberty. And this last is the Case of some Vows to God. We ought to make none rashly: but such as we have made, we ought to keep;

[i] Psal. xv. 1, 5.

unless

unleſs we have Ground to think, it is not his Will, that we ſhould. And we ought to ſuppoſe it is his Will, if they neither contradict any of our Duties in Life, nor on the whole increaſe our Temptations: above all, if they help us to abſtain from Sin, and improve in Virtue. But if our Vow be abſurd, and unworthy of him, to whom we offer it; fitted only to load us with Difficulties, and enſnare us into Tranſgreſſions; nor is likely ever to have any better Effect; and if this be not merely the Language of our Inclinations, but the Dictate of our beſt Judgment, and that of other ſerious and able Perſons; we may well conclude, it was never accepted and ratified by our Maker, but on the contrary diſpleaſing to him: and therefore is neither neceſſary, nor proper to be obſerved by us. But if, in any of theſe Caſes abovementioned, any real Cauſe of Doubt appear, the punctual and diſintereſted Side is ever the ſafeſt. For to him, that *deſpiſeth the Oath*, and *breaketh the Covenant, thus ſaith the Lord God: as I live, ſurely mine Oath that he hath deſpiſed, and my Covenant that he hath broken, I will recompenſe it upon his own Head*[k].

[k] Ezek. xvii. 18, 19.

Such

Such then is the Obligation of promiſſory Oaths: into which Obligation we all enter, though not in common legal Form, yet in real Effect, by the Vow of our Baptiſm, and we acknowledge it by every ſubſequent Act of Religion. Every Time therefore that we worſhip God, or in any other Way profeſs ourſelves to be Chriſtians, we bind ourſelves to every Act of Chriſtian Duty. But, to ſpeak only of worldly Affairs: they, in the firſt Place, are under this Tie, who promiſe Faith and Allegiance, as good Subjects to the King. If any doubt of his Title to it, they ought to apply for what they may ſoon have, better Inſtruction. If they remain unſatisfied, they ought to refuſe the Oath: and if they do ſo on a Principle of Conſcience, though an erroneous one, they deſerve Pity and Eſteem. But whoever takes it contrary to his Belief, and contrary to his Intention, is a Profligate.

In the next Place, they ought frequently to conſider the Nature of this Obligation, who have promiſed due Execution of Juſtice, as Magiſtrates: faithful Diſcharge of their Truſt, as Officers: Diligence in teaching and exemplary Lives, as Miniſters of God's Word. And laſtly, it extends to all, who in their private Capacity ſolemnly engage themſelves to each

other,

other, either in the more important Relations of Life, particularly that nearest one of Marriage; or indeed on any Occasion whatever. For though some Occasions may be much too slight to justify an Oath; yet, when we have given it, the Lord is Witness, if we fail to perform according to the Words we have spoken.

And now it must be observed further, concerning all Oaths, that they are ever to be taken in their plain Sense, and that in which we are understood to take them: for to have any other in Reserve, is only to mislead and deceive, under Pretence of giving Information and Assurance. If the Oath be a voluntary one, which we have framed ourselves; it can have no Ambiguity, but what is of our own making: and if we make it on Purpose to take Advantage of it, we are deliberately and shockingly wicked. Indeed when the Words are prescribed us by others, by Authority for Instance, if they are fairly capable of two Senses, and it no Way appears which was meant; we may certainly use them in either. But this will very seldom happen: and to invent forced and strained Interpretations, to evade binding ourselves whilst we seem to do it, is if possible, worse of the two, than flat Perjury without any Evasion: for he is undoubtedly the most thorough Sinner,

ner, who is ſo with the moſt Art and Contrivance.

Some perhaps may imagine, that on certain Occaſions, Oaths are become, by Cuſtom, inſignificant. And it muſt be owned, that Cuſtom frequently alters the Senſe of Expreſſions in common Converſation; and ſometimes brings them by Degrees to be mere Words of Courſe. But ſolemn Aſſertions or Promiſes, above all upon Oath, are much too ſerious Affairs to have their Meaning changed, or ſunk into nothing, by the Caprice and Fancy of the World, which governs in trifling Talk. Appealing to God, in the Nature of the Thing, can never be a Matter of Form only. And the more there are, who, in any Caſe, treat it as ſuch; the more there are, whom *the Lord will not hold him guiltleſs*[1]. For when this awful Tie is once come to be careleſsly and habitually broken, in any one Inſtance, be it what it will, there is a broad Way ſet open, to break it in every other. And though, for a while, Men may forſwear themſelves without Fear on one Occaſion, and yet ſcruple it on another; they will ſoon diſcover, that the Difference cannot be exceeding great: and accordingly, firſt one Step farther will be

[1] Exod. xx. 7.

taken,

taken, then another; they that ſee this, will imitate and go beyond it; and at length general Confuſion will be the Conſequence. For we cannot ſubſiſt without placing Confidence in each other: and the firmeſt Bond of Confidence are Oaths. If therefore they loſe their Credit; mutual Truſt will ceaſe, or become as pernicious, as mutual Diffidence; and Miſchief will follow, without Bounds and without Remedy.

Nor are theſe dreadful Evils by any Means the only Aggravation of this Sin. Scarce any other affronts and dares God ſo immediately and directly. For the perjured Man renounces his Mercy to his Face; and openly calls upon him to execute his Anger, if he will. Beſides, natural Inclinations, the Growth of our very Frame, prompt us to moſt Sins that we commit, and diſguiſe them to our View under ſpecious Appearances. But every Principle within us, till we ſtupify them all, revolts at the very Thought of Perjury. The Advantages, that Men gain by it, may indeed be extremely pleaſing; but they cannot fail to be ſhocked originally at this Manner of gaining them; and therefore, if they uſe it, muſt act in full Oppoſition both to their Conſciences and their Hearts. Of other Inſtances of Wickedneſs the World is apt to think very

favourably; and indulge and encourage those that practise them. But a Man wilfully forsworn is an Object of universal Abhorrence. He deserves to be so in all Cases: he is so in most: and if in any, a Person, that is known to be such, can be looked on with the same Eye, as his Neighbours; just in the Degree that this prevails, human Society tends to a Dissolution.

Every Member of it therefore is concerned to express his Detestation of so impious and destructive a Crime. Law-makers ought to enact the most effectual Provisions against it: Magistrates ought to put them in Execution, with peculiar Vigour: and every Method should be taken, to render the very Imagination of such Wickedness alarming to Men. One Method of unspeakable Use, would be, to administer Oaths with great Solemnity; a Thing shamefully neglected amongst us: another, of which we are equally unmindful, to appoint as few of them as possible. Oaths, given and taken frequently, will be given and taken irreverently: till at last Multitudes will regard them very little more, than they do common Swearing in their daily Conversation. But especially they should spared, where if they are not, Interest will be perpetually tempting

tempting Men to uſe them falſely, or procure others to do it in their Stead. Elſe, great Numbers will be drawn into a dreadful Sin, of which otherwiſe they would never have thought; and being conſcious to themſelves of having often tranſgreſſed ſo ſacred an Obligation, will make leſs Difficulty of tranſgreſſing others alſo. The Intent of ſubjecting Men to ſuch Oaths, will be anſwered very imperfectly and unequally: the Bad will be Gainers by Perjury: and the Good be put under heavy Diſadvantages, perhaps be ruined, becauſe they dare not incur the ſame Guilt. Theſe are plain Reaſons why Swearing ſhould never be required by Law from thoſe, whoſe Property, or any other favourite Intereſt, is concerned, if it can be avoided.

Yet ſtill, when ſuch Oaths are preſcribed, though unneceſſarily and imprudently, it may be impoſſible for either Buſineſs or Juſtice to go go on, unleſs they are adminiſtered. But both Scripture and common Reaſon dictate, that no one ought to take them, who cannot do it with the utmoſt Sincerity. And therefore if our State of Life be ſuch, that we cannot refuſe them without ſuffering by the Refuſal, we muſt either change it for another, not liable

to the ſame Inconvenience; or bear patiently what a good Conſcience brings upon us, and a good God will reward us for.

I muſt not conclude, without begging you to obſerve, that the Rules, which have been laid down, concerning Aſſertions and Promiſes on Oath, hold good concerning other Aſſertions and Promiſes too: and how crying a Sin ſoever Falſehood is in the former, Falſehood in the latter is the very next to it; hath the ſame bad Effects of deſtroying Faith and Truſt amongſt Men, though in ſomewhat a lower Degree; and the Opportunities for it are ſo much more frequent, that a Lyar, who never ſwore in his Life, may, by often repeating this leſſer Crime, be more guilty on the whole, than even the perjured Wretch, whom perhaps he holds in Abhorrence. Remember then, that whether you call upon God to be Witneſs of what you ſay, or not; he is Witneſs. And it is preſumptuous Wickedneſs, to utter an Untruth in the Preſence of the God of Truth. For *lying Lips are Abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly, are his Delight*[m].

[m] Prov. xii. 22.

SERMON XIV.

EXOD. xx. 7.

Thou ſhalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltleſs, that taketh his Name in vain.

I HAVE already obſerved to you from theſe Words, that the Phraſe of *taking the Name of God in vain*, ſtrictly tranſlated, expreſſes taking and joining it to *Vanity:* and that *Vanity* in Scripture Language means either what is not, or what, being of ſmall Conſequence, may be conſidered as if it were not. So that the Prohibition of ſwearing in vain, or to Vanity, comprehends both ſwearing to what hath no Truth in it, and to what is of no ſufficient Importance. Having therefore laid before you the Nature and Guilt of the former of theſe Crimes, I ſhall now ſpeak of the latter; and ſhew you the Sinfulneſs of Oaths, and Imprecations, and every Thing approaching towards

them, in common Diſcourſe. I am very ſenſible, that ſcarce any Thing can be ſaid on this Subject, but what you have often heard, and know perfectly well beforehand. And it is a great Aggravation of Men's Wickedneſs, that they will tranſgreſs, where they cannot plead Ignorance. Perhaps there never was a Preacher yet, that hath not publickly warned his Hearers againſt profane Swearing: perhaps there never was a Perſon guilty of it, that hath not been told of his Fault in private too. Yet how little the Effect hath been, your own Ears may inform you ſo abundantly every Day, that no one can imagine it needleſs to ſay more on this Head. Uſeleſs indeed they may apprehend it will prove to great Numbers. But were that a Reaſon for being ſilent on any Point of Doctrine, think with yourſelves (and a ſad Thought it is) what one Point would there remain for us to ſpeak upon? Undoubtedly we ſhould preach the Word of God with much more Comfort, if we ſaw a Proſpect of doing it with more Succeſs. But be our Hope of that ever ſo low, we muſt preach every Part of it; and you muſt regard, or diſregard it, as you pleaſe, and take the Conſequences. Our Commiſſion is the ſame with that of the Prophet;

Son of Man, go unto the Children of thy People and ſpeak my Words unto them, and tell them, thus ſaith the Lord God, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear [a]. Did only the lower Part of Mankind uſe his Name irreverently; yet they are the Bulk of Mankind; and their preſent and future Happineſs ought to be of as much Concern to themſelves, and to us, as that of their Betters. But if their Betters alſo rival them, often but too ſucceſsfully, in the ſhocking Competition of profane Language; if that Sex, on whom it ſits the worſt, are not intirely free from it; and even thoſe Perſons, who are ſeldom guilty of it themſelves, by no Means take ſufficient Care to reſtrain it in others; the Neceſſity of giving frequent Cautions againſt it from the Pulpit becomes proportionably greater.

In Diſcharge of this Obligation therefore, I beg you to obſerve concerning all ſuch Expreſſions,

I. That God hath abſolutely forbidden them.

II. That there are many ſtrong Reaſons, why he ſhould.

III. That *Heathens*, as well as *Jews* and *Chriſtians*, have condemned them.

[a] Ezek. iii. 10, 11.

IV. That no Plea of any Weight can be made in Favour of them.

V. That all may, if they will, easily abstain from them.

Were all Men disposed as they ought to be, one should think it might be enough of itself, that our Maker hath absolutely forbidden the unnecessary Use of his Name. The Words of the Text are extremely plain: you hear them read every Lord's Day: and you pray to him as often as you hear them, that he would *incline your Hearts to keep this Law*. Then the Words of our blessed Lord in the Gospel, are so exceeding strong against needless Oaths, that rather than not condemn them effectually, he hath chosen to speak, as if he condemned all Oaths. And for Imprecations, no Precept in the World ever was more express, than that of the Apostle against them: *Bless and curse not*[b]. What shall we say then? Do we allow, that God hath a Right to rule us, or do we deny it? You will not say, he cannot forbid common Swearing and Cursing: and surely, if he can, he hath. You will not say, that this Sort of Language is a Duty: why then do not the Prohibitions of Scripture make it a Sin?

[b] Rom. xii. 14.

Suppose

Suppoſe you could perceive no manner of Harm in the Practice, doth not God know better? And is it no Harm to do, what he hath ſaid you ſhall not do? Suppoſe he intends it only for a Trial and Exerciſe of your Obedience: is that a Reaſon, why you ſhould diſobey? Would you bear that a Child or a Servant ſhould treat you ſo? And can it be fit Treatment then of the Father and Lord of all? Surely, when once his Will is declared, that alone may be ſufficient to regulate our Behaviour; and it doth not look well to be very exact in demanding to know why, before we ſubmit.

However, that you may ſee this Obligation in a yet fuller Light; and that Religion may ſuffer no Imputation of impoſing arbitrary Commands in the preſent Caſe; I proceed to ſhew you

II. That there are ſtrong Reaſons for the Precept now before us: which you will ſoon diſcern, if you think but a little of the Nature and Tendency of the Manner of ſpeaking, which it forbids. God is a Being, to whom the very higheſt of his Creatures owe all poſſible Regard and Honour. And certainly our low Condition and many Sins, ought not to leſſen, but increaſe it. Both our Virtue, and

our Happineſs here and hereafter, depend on preſerving ſacredly in our Minds a Veneration for our Creator, ſuch as may influence every Action and Thought. Can it then be allowable to intermix *his holy and reverend Name*[c] with all the Trifles and all the Follies, of our common Talk: to uſe that as an Inſtrument for venting our ſinful Anger, for confirming every idle Aſſertion we are pleaſed to utter, for making our Diſcourſe appear more lively and humorous? Can it be fit, we ſhould embelliſh every ſilly and affected Exclamation of ours with the Name of God and his Chriſt; and introduce the Mention of his meritorious Death, of the Wounds which he received, and the Blood which he ſhed, for our Redemption, on ſuch ſhameful Occaſions, as Men daily do? Think only, what Sort of Things they are, to which you ſometimes hear the Lord of Heaven and Earth invoked to be a Voucher: Things, which Men would be aſhamed to hint at in the Preſence of an earthly Superior: and yet the great God is called upon, familiarly and without Scruple, to attend to them; called upon ſometimes to bear Witneſs, that we reſolve to do, what we know he hath forbidden on Pain

[c] Pſal. cxi. 9.

of

of Hell-fire. Be aſſured he is a Witneſs, and will be an Avenger too. *The Lord our God is a jealous God*[d]. And he cannot ſuffer the Honour of that *Name* to be proſtituted thus, which he hath commanded us to pray may be ſanctified and *hallowed*.

Should he permit it, Piety and Virtue would be loſt from off the Earth. For if Men make free in this Manner with the moſt ſacred of all Things; talk of God and his Terrors in Jeſt; and call down his Wrath, in this World and the next, on themſelves and one another, for nothing, ſome of them almoſt as often as they ſpeak; what Poſſibility is there, that any real Senſe of Duty ſhould remain amongſt them? Did you ever know a common Swearer, that was in Earneſt religious? It cannot be. Either the Fear of God will keep him from this Practice, or this Practice will wear out of his Mind the Fear of God. That Awfulneſs, which ſurrounds and guards Religion, will be turned into Scorn, by taking ſuch Liberties with the moſt important Articles of it. Conſider: to ſwear is to acknowledge the Perfections of God, to pay him an Act of Worſhip and Homage. Oaths are conſecrated by him to ſerve, on fit Occa-

[d] Exod. xx. 5.

ſions, to this Purpoſe only. What a Crime muſt it be then, to debaſe them to ſuch mean and vile Uſes, as Multitudes do! Suppoſe any other Act of Worſhip were treated in the ſame Manner, and profaned every Hour, careleſsly, and even in Mockery; how would this appear to you, and what muſt the Conſequence be? Now let ſuch Impiety be as ſhocking as it will; that of common Swearing is in its Nature full as ſhocking: and it is dreadful, that Men are ſo habituated to it, as not to feel it.

But farther: when Men are once grown fearleſs enough to break this known and plain Law of Duty; what Principles have they to deter them from breaking any other? When the Reverence of God is ſo effaced from their Hearts, that they can uſe his Name with Diſregard and Contempt; what Hope or Thought can there be left in them of pleaſing him? and where then is the Security of their not going on to offend him by whatever additional Sins they chance to like? Undoubtedly there are thoſe who will ſwear, and yet will not commit ſome other Sorts of Wickedneſs. But there are few, if any perhaps, that will ſwear, and yet will commit no other Sort of Wickedneſs. And there are many, that began with this Tranſ-

greſſion

greſſion only; but when once the Breach in their Conſcience was made, it ſoon widened, and they admitted through it, by Degrees, all the Vileneſs in the World. He therefore, that would not expoſe himſelf to become profligate in all Reſpects, muſt beware of becoming ſo in this. And they, that would not have their Children or Servants ſcruple nothing, muſt take care they ſhall ſcruple Swearing. For this is generally one of the firſt Steps which they take towards complete Worthleſſneſs. And they go on afterwards much the faſter, for another Reaſon. While they diſlike profane Language, they are unqualified for profane Company. Execrations and Blaſphemies make them tremble, and keep them at a Diſtance from the Abandoned. But if theſe Things loſe their Horror, that Barrier is removed, and they are eaſily drawn in to contract Intimacies with thoſe, who often *make them*, in a little Time, as our Saviour expreſſes it, *two-fold more the Children of Hell, than themſelves* [e].

Thus doth common Swearing lead to all Wickedneſs: but it leads peculiarly to that of falſe Swearing. *In a Multitude of Words*, the wiſe Man obſerves, *there wanteth not Sin* [f]. And in a Multitude of Oaths, there will never

[e] Matth. xxiii. 16. [f] Prov. x. 19.

want

want Perjury. The leſs of it any one runs into, who throws the Name of God out of his Mouth at Random, the greater his good Fortune is: but as the boldeſt Swearers are almoſt conſtantly the freeſt Talkers too; and call Heaven to witneſs the moſt plentifully, juſt at thoſe Times when they ſpeak with the leaſt Conſideration and Government of their Tongues; they cannot avoid being guilty of falſe Oaths perpetually. And, let any one of them ſpeak his Conſcience, he muſt own he hath been perjured a thouſand Times. Perhaps he will plead, that he was not in Earneſt. And were that always true, though I believe it is not, far from it, in any one ſuch Perſon's Caſe in the World; yet is Perjury a Matter to jeſt with? Are Invocations of God, ſolemn Vows and Imprecations, Things for Men to caſt wantonly around them, and *ſay, Am I not in Sport*[g]? Remember, he, with whom you take theſe Liberties, hath made no Allowance for them in his Word, nor conſequently will make any at the great Day. The Rule of his Law is expreſs: *Ye ſhall not ſwear by my Name falſely; neither ſhalt thou profane the Name of thy God: I am the Lord*[h]. And we have no

[g] Prov. xxvi. 19. [h] Lev. xix. 12.

Manner

Manner of Intimation, that this Command is to give Way, as often as we think it proper to divert ourſelves with tranſgreſſing it. Beſides, there is but a Step, and it is eaſily made, from ſwearing falſely in Jeſt, or half Earneſt, to doing the ſame Thing in downright Earneſt. Taking Oaths too frequently, and with too little Solemnity, even before legal Officers, is acknowledged to diminiſh the Reverence due to them. What muſt it do then, to uſe them continually in common Converſation, without any Ceremony at all? And how can it be expected, that a Man, who, without the leaſt Fear of God, or Regard to Truth, ſwears a hundred Times over to whatever comes uppermoſt one Hour, ſhall perhaps the very next, (provided you change the Scene) become ſuperior to every Thing that would corrupt his Integrity in bearing Teſtimony? It will doubtleſs be ſaid to this, that a Man's Honour ſufficiently binds him to Veracity, when he gives his ſolemn Oath, let his Senſe of Religion be as little as it will. But what if he can hope to avoid Diſcovery, and ſave his Honour? What if he prefers his Intereſt before his Honour? What if he thinks forſwearing himſelf, on ſome Occaſions, no Breach of his Honour, perhaps a Point of Honour? What ſhall bind him

him then, if the Fear of profaning God's Name doth not? But ſtill, it muſt be owned you will ſay, that many common Swearers are Men of Truth and Probity. Why ſome, we acknowledge, are: and great Pity it is, that ſuch as they, will be common Swearers. But if this Practice doth not lead every one into deliberate Perjury, is it not enough, that it leads many, that it tempts and endangers all the reſt; and that they cannot know beforehand, how great the Danger may, at one Time or other prove? He that is ſwearing and vowing continually, it muſt happen, that ſooner or later, he will ſwear to do ſomething unlawful. What a Snare now is this! It is a Sin to have taken ſuch an Oath: It is another Sin to perform it: and yet it looks extremely like a Sin, not to perform it. Still he certainly ought not: but it is a great Chance, whether the Fear, or the Shame, of that imaginary Sin, may not drive him into the real one. Such probably was the Caſe of *Jephtha:* ſuch undoubtedly was that of *Herod*; who had never been guilty of murdering *John* the Baptiſt, if he had not firſt been guilty of Swearing inconſiderately. For the Evangeliſts expreſsly tell us, *The King was exceeding ſorry: yet for his Oath's Sake, and for their Sakes who ſat at Meat*

with

with him, he ſent and beheaded John in the Priſon[i]. Indeed it is a common Excuſe, that Men make for acting, as they are ſenſible they ought not, and would not elſe, that they have ſworn to do it, and therefore muſt and will.

But ſuppoſe the Danger were only that of ſwearing to do Things not unlawful in their Nature, but inconvenient and prejudicial to us; it would ſurely be a ſufficient Reaſon againſt needleſs Oaths. For in that Caſe, unleſs we be releaſed from our Engagement, which we cannot always be, the Scripture very juſtly directs: *If a Man vow a Vow unto the Lord, or ſwear an Oath to bind his Soul with a Bond: he ſhall not break his Word; he ſhall do according to all, that proceedeth out of his Mouth*[k]. Is it not then a very wiſe Caution, which *Solomon* gives? *Be not raſh with thy Mouth: and let not thine Heart be haſty to utter any Thing before God*[l]. For many a Time have Men lamented, through their whole Lives, the unhappy Conſequences of one ſingle Oath.

It is very true, we may entangle ourſelves by unlawful or imprudent Promiſes, tho' we do add this Confirmation to them. But yet, Oaths are underſtood to be, and therefore are, a much

i Matt. xiv. 9, 10. Mark vi. 26, 27. k Numb. xxx. 2.
l Eccl. v. 2.

more

more ſolemn and ſtrong and irrevocable Tie, than mere Promiſes; and conſequently make the Caſe juſt ſo much the worſe. Beſides, the ſame Guard upon themſelves, that reſtrains Men from ſwearing raſhly, will reſtrain them alſo from promiſing raſhly: whereas he, that is ready to pour out Oaths on every Occaſion, is in perpetual Danger of binding himſelf down at once, by the ſtrongeſt Obligation under which he can be laid.

On the whole therefore, the Son of *Sirach's* Advice is extremely important. *Hear, O ye Children, the Diſcipline of the Mouth: He that keepeth it, ſhall never be taken in his Lips.—Accuſtom not thy Mouth to ſwearing: neither uſe thyſelf to the naming of the Holy One. For as the Servant, that is continually beaten, ſhall not be without a blue Mark; ſo he, that ſweareth and nameth God continually, ſhall not be faultleſs. A Man, that uſeth much Swearing ſhall be filled with Iniquity, and the Plague ſhall never depart from his Houſe. If he ſhall offend, his Sin ſhall be upon him: and if he acknowledge not his Sin he maketh a double Offence.—There is a Word that is clothed about with Death: God grant that it be not found in the Heritage of Jacob: for all ſuch Things ſhall be far from the Godly*[m].

[m] Ecclus xxiii. 7—12.

But,

But, besides the Sins and Dangers which I have hitherto pointed out, consider the Matter in another Light, and you will see many more, of great Moment, attending this Practice. The Spirit of Religion is a Spirit of Mildness and Benevolence. Even the Irreligious, if they profess any Regard to Principle, profess a high Esteem for these Virtues. And there are few Things less consistent with them, than the common Use of Oaths and Imprecations. Cursing is the Expression of a Heart, not satisfied with the Mischief, that we can and dare inflict ourselves, but that seeks to interest even the great God, in making the Person, with whom we are displeased, completely miserable. Recollect but a little, the dreadful Words, that are uttered; consider a while, what Things they are, which they who indulge themselves this Way, beg of Heaven may fall on one another's Heads: is it possible for the very Fiends to go beyond the Rage and Malignity of such Language? And let it not be pleaded, that they mean nothing of what they say. They mean often but too much of it, at least for the Time; mean almost always to shew a very sinful Wrath and Bitterness: and the Way, which they take to shew it, inflames it still more. For hardly any Thing

upon Earth blows up Anger to ſo outrageous a Vehemence, as venting it in Oaths and Curſes. They rouſe up the Paſſion of thoſe, who uſe them: they provoke Paſſion in Return from thoſe to whom they are uſed: and when once the Flame thus kindled, blazes out on both Sides, can there be in Nature a more helliſh Spectacle ſeen or imagined? But ſuppoſe the Swearer to be of a calmer Diſpoſition; continually throwing out Phraſes, of ſuch terrible Import, upon all who are about him, cannot fail to leſſen whatever Humanity he hath, and harden his Heart towards them gradually. The leaſt they imply is an immoral Diſregard of what becomes of them. And we ſhall never preſerve that equitable Attention to others and their Remonſtrances, which we certainly ought, if once we get a Habit of driving away with a haſty Curſe, whoever at any Time importunes us with his Applications. Common Swearers may be, to ſome Perſons, and on ſome Occaſions, very good natured Men: but on others, they find a threatening Oath or two is ſo very ſhort and eaſy a Way, to get rid of a Difficulty, right or wrong, that they often venture on moſt barbarous Behaviour, under this Protection: and ſometimes, it may be feared, affect ſuch Language,

guage, merely to ſcreen them from doing their Duties, and in particular from paying their Debts; or to deceive thoſe, with whom they converſe; or terrify thoſe whom they cannot deceive.

But beſides that Oaths and Curſes are commonly uſed to ſupport other Injuries, they are Injuries and Outrages themſelves. To our Superiors they are Affronts and Indignities: to our Equals they are Rudeneſs: and it is a mean-ſpirited Inſolence to ſhew our Contempt of thoſe beneath us, by them, for no other Reaſon, than becauſe we know they muſt bear it. But indeed Words of this Nature are juſtly offenſive, not only to the Perſons, againſt whom you direct them, but to all within hearing. For how have they deſerved, to be made Witneſſes, whether they will or not, of all the Brutalities you are pleaſed to utter? Even before thoſe who have no Religion, ſuch Tranſports muſt be extremely unbecoming. But remember too, there are ſome who have Religion; whoſe Ears it grates, and whoſe Heart it grieves, as well it may, to hear the Commandments of their God tranſgreſſed, and his holy Name profaned wantonly. Why are not theſe to have due Regard paid them? Why ſhould it

 not

not be thought, in a Nation professing Christianity, a Point of common Decency, in all Men, to abstain from open Violations of Christian Precepts? And really, to behave without common Decency, above all to the Religion of a Country, is of itself no small Immorality. The other Civilities of Life are generally kept up, in outward Form at least; and often to a great Degree of Delicacy. Whatever would be unpleasing to any one, be the Dislike of it ever so fanciful, is carefully avoided: and it is of considerable Importance to our Happiness, to act so. What Ground is there then, to make an Exception in this one Case? And why must you treat *the King of all the Earth*[n], before those who honour him, with that Disrespect, which you would not express towards any common Person, for whom any of the Company present had the least Regard? Such Behaviour would produce dangerous Resentments, on almost every other Occasion, from most Men. And though real Christians will in no Way revenge your Treatment of them, but join Pity for you with their Uneasiness at your Discourse; this surely is no Reason, why you should give them that Uneasiness; and much

[n] Psal. xlvii. 7.

less,

lefs, why you fhould purpofely fingle them out to feel it, as I fear is fometimes done. But indeed fuch Converfation muft be offenfive to all in general, who have any Confideration, either of good Senfe or Agreeablenefs. It is irrational, it is abfurd, it excites Images that are fhocking, it makes Men appear like Devils, to bring Death, and Hell, and eternal Damnation, into every Sentence, let the Subject of Difcourfe be what it will. As for the Excufe, that thefe Phrafes are fo familiar, that they make no Impreffion, raife no Ideas; there was a Time at leaft, nor could it be a fhort one, when they did: and in Proportion, as the Meaning of fuch Words is thus effaced and loft, I doubt all Concern about the Things, that once were meant, is effaced and loft too; and Solicitude to obtain everlafting Happinefs, or efcape everlafting Mifery, worn out of Men's Hearts. Yet ftill, God be thanked, there are fome remaining, to whom profane Language carries its original Terror: and, for their Sakes, if for no other Reafon, it ought to be avoided. But far from that, they themfelves, who alledge this Plea of its being infignificant, feldom fail to confute it, by inventing new Oaths and Curfes, as faft as ever

they can, to alarm and awe thoſe that hear them, for fear the old ones ſhould have loſt the Power of doing it. And thus their Language becomes every Day more and more diabolical; till ſuch Kind of Expreſſions make up perhaps near Half of what ſome of them ſay. Now were each of theſe Offences, taken ſingly, much lighter than it is; yet how enormous a Weight of Sin muſt the inceſſant Repetition of them amount to, in the Courſe of a Man's Life; and how heavy may it preſs on his Conſcience, when he comes to die! Then beſides, it is a Crime of public Scandal, and bad Example: you may lead great Numbers of others into it, or encourage them in it; your Acquaintance, your Friends, your Servants, your Children; may contribute largely to their Ruin, and ſhare deeply in their Guilt. Nay, you may contribute, much more than you think of, to the Increaſe of other Wickedneſſes too; and, by Conſequence, towards bringing down the Judgments of God upon your Country. For, let ſome think as ſlightly as they will of taking his Name in vain, it is a notorious Fact, that all Manner of Crimes grow common and barefaced along with it: and therefore in Proportion as that increaſes

amongſt

amongst any People, they gradually ripen for Destruction. Accordingly we find the Prophet *Jeremiah* declaring expressly, that *because of Swearing the Land mourneth*[o]. And *Hosea* puts down that, in the first Place, as the leading Sin of those many, for which the *Lord had a Controversy with the Children of Israel. By swearing, and lying, and stealing, and committing Adultery they break out, and Blood toucheth Blood. Therefore shall the Land mourn; and every one, that dwelleth therein, shall languish*[p]. May God in his Mercy give us Grace to *turn ourselves from all our Transgressions, that so Iniquity may not be our Ruin*[q].

[o] Jer. xxiii. 10. [p] Hos. iv. 1, 2, 3. [q] Ezek. xviii. 30.

SERMON XV.

EXOD. xx. 7.

Thou ſhalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltleſs, that taketh his Name in vain.

IN diſcourſing on theſe Words, after laying before you the Nature and Guilt of Perjury, I proceeded to treat of raſh and needleſs Oaths and Imprecations: concerning which I have ſhewn,

I. That the mere Prohibition of Scripture is alone ſufficient Obligation to abſtain from them: and yet

II. That the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in forbidding them is evident; as they are plainly inconſiſtent with a Senſe of Piety and Reverence towards him, with the Support of Truth and Juſtice in the World, with a Behaviour of Humanity and common Decency.

Theſe Things being proved, there may ſeem to be little Need of ſaying any Thing further

concerning this Sin. But as too many are apt to think, either that Chriſtian Preachers are led by Prejudice to dreſs it up in falſe Terrors, or that whatever Objections there may be againſt it, there are likewiſe conſiderable Pleas to be made in its Favour; or, at leaſt, that in certain Circumſtances Men cannot abſtain from it: I beg your Attention once more to the Subject, whilſt I prove,

III. That others, as well as Chriſtians, have condemned common Swearing.

IV. That the Pleas, alledged for it, are of no Weight.

V. That, by obſerving a few plain Directions, Men may both avoid it, and even cure themſelves and others of it.

III. In ſpeaking to the third Head, I might properly remind you of what I mentioned in the firſt Diſcourſe on this Subject, that the old *Jewiſh* Teachers condemned Oaths, almoſt as ſtrongly as our Saviour himſelf: nay, that *Solomon* hath ſet down the Character of *him that ſweareth* as a bad one; and of *him that feareth an Oath*, as a good one[a]. But ſome may poſſibly except againſt Authorities from theſe Writers; as being of a Religion too near akin

[a] Eccl. ix, 2.

to

to our own. Therefore none ſhall be quoted but Heathens. And though their very Poets[b] and Orators[c], as well as Lawgivers and Philoſophers, have delivered Rules, agreeable to thoſe of Scripture, on this Point; I ſhall produce only ſome of the latter. *Rhadamanthus*, the *Cretan* Legiſlator forbad all Swearing directly by the Name of God, to preſerve it from Profanation[d]. To reverence an Oath, is a well known Precept of the famous *Pythagoras*[e]. And the Philoſopher *Hierocles*, in his Commentary upon it, hath the following Words. *This Precept requires Men, not only to ſpeak Truth when they ſwear, but to abſtain from Swearing: not to uſe Oaths frequently, and raſhly, and about Trifles, to fill up a Sentence, or confirm a common Story. For ſo ſhall we obſerve Truth in our Oaths, if we be ſparing of them: But from frequent Swearing to falſe Swearing, is an eaſy Fall.* *Plato* directs that Men do not on ſlight Occaſions name God; and ſcarce on any ſwear by him[f]. *Avoid Oaths*, ſaith *Epictetus*[g], *if it be poſſible, intirely: but*

[b] *Chœrilus* and *Menander* in *Grot.* on *Matth.* v. 34. [c] *Iſoc.* ad *Demonic.* [d] See Note [k] on Serm. XII. on Oaths, p. 236. [e] *Aur. Carm* 2. *Diog. Laert.* alſo gives this amongſt his Doctrines. *Diod. Sic. Excerpt.* l. 6. p. 555. ſaith, that *Pythagoras* παρηγγειλε τοις μανθανουσι σπανιως μεν ομνυναι, χρησαμενοις δε τοις ορκοις παντως εμμενειν. [f] *De Legibus*, L. xi. [g] *Ench.* c. 33.

if not, to the utmost of your Power. An Oath, saith his Commentator *Simplicius, is calling God to witness, and making him a Voucher to what we say. Now to introduce God on little and insignificant Occasions, expresses a Contempt of him.* The earliest of these Men were certainly under none of the Prepossessions, which it may be fancied we are: and though such of them, as lived after Christ, are much the most explicit and the strongest in condemning all needless Oaths, and therefore may be supposed to have learnt their Dislike of them from Believers in him; yet this only shews, that though they opposed Christianity in general, they were forced to confess the Excellency of its Doctrine in this Particular, and to adopt it. For they say most exactly the same Things, that we do: nor can any one Writer, of any Nation upon Earth, be produced, that ever said the contrary. All the Authority therefore, as well as all the Reason in the World, bears Testimony to the Fitness and Importance of God's Command in this Matter: and what Pleas can there be on the other Side, to excuse our Disobedience? Let us proceed

IV. To consider them.

Some perhaps may imagine, that Oaths procure Credit to what they say. But are any more

more credited, than thoſe, who never ſwear in their Diſcourſe at all? or any leſs, than thoſe, who ſwear every Moment? This is the Way to lower and deſtroy, not raiſe, your Credit. For it ſeems to imply a voluntary Acknowledgement, on your own Part, that your mere Affirmation is unworthy of Regard. You know beſt indeed, whether it deſerves Belief or not. But if it doth, you are very unwiſe to add more. It is conſidered, as no ſmall Privilege, allowed to the Rank of ſome Perſons, that their Aſſertion is admitted without an Oath, in legal Proceedings on Matters of great Moment. Why ſhould not you partake of that Privilege, as far as you can? Why will you degrade yourſelf needleſsly? If your bare Word be in Truth a ſufficient Security; keep up the Honour of it; and reſerve additional Confirmations for Occaſions of high Importance, for ſuch as ſeldom happen, and where an Oath is indiſpenſable. By making them common in every Caſe, you loſe the Advantage of them in extraordinary Caſes. It is the Character which Men preſerve, not merely the Form of Words which they uſe, that muſt give Weight to what they ſay. And if your Character be ſunk; till you raiſe it again by a right

right Behaviour, all other Ways to gain Credit will have very little Effect. You may join if you will, the Sin of Swearing with that of Lying; but no one will suspect you the less of the latter, for hearing you guilty of the former. You may try to cloke Falsehood with Perjury: but you will soon be detected, and doubly abhorred: whereas if you will learn to speak Truth, you will never need Oaths. But indeed they who make this Plea very often swear and curse, just as freely, in Cases, where they cannot make it: in saying what no one doubts; in Matters not of Fact, but of speculative Opinion; or Matters depending, not on their Testimony, but that of others; nay sometimes, in the very asking of a Question.

Instead of this Excuse therefore, a different one is invented; that where this Kind of Language is not wanted to gain Belief, at least it commands Respect. But is any one, in Reality, ever the better thought of for it; or the worse for Want of it? Did you ever hear it said, or intimated, that such a one was a Man of no Understanding, or no Honour, or no Consequence, because be was never known to swear; or was a Person of singular Worth and Importance, because he had a greater Plenty and Variety

Variety of Oaths, than other Men? What Sort of Respect must it be then, that such Phrases can procure you? Perhaps you hope to appear terrible by the Use of them. But where is the Need of appearing so? It should rather be the Care of reasonable Creatures, to appear mild, and humane, and agreeable to each other. It is true, Men in some Stations must carry Awe with them: but this is not the Way to it. Swearing frights none, but those whom it is unmanly to fright: and the Affectation of giving much Terror, is a well-known Mark, and commonly, though not always, a true one, of little Courage. All the threatening Imprecations in the World can only shew, that he who uses them, is an angry Man, or would seem so: but as his Anger is not in the least of more Consequence, with them, than without them; so it may be shewn full as effectually without them, as with them. Nay, very often, such as would submit upon a moderate and decent Reproof, are exasperated by the Outrage of being sworn at; and it may be, provoked to return the Language they receive: in which Case, all that Superiors get by it, is, teaching their Inferiors to curse them to their Faces; and throwing down the Distinction they meant to keep up. Some indeed are so used to pour

out Oaths, on all confiderable Occafions, that they are little minded if they do not: but then they are commonly fo ufed to it, upon inconfiderable ones alfo, that they are not much more minded, if they do. Or however that be, as this pretended Neceffity of Swearing arifes wholly from a Habit of Swearing without Neceffity; your having been guilty already can never juftify your becoming more fo. But your plain Way is, leave off thefe wrong Methods of making yourfelf attended to, and apply diligently to the right ones: and after a while, one calm Word of Command or Direction will go a great deal farther, than ever fo much Blufter and Blafphemy did before. At firft indeed you may be under Difficulties; but as your preceding Tranfgreffions of your Duty have brought them upon you, you muft bear them with Patience. Or fuppofing, that not you, but others before you, have fo accuftomed thofe, with whom you are concerned, to this Language, that they will not eafily be kept in Order without it: ftill, which of the two is fitter; that you fhould deliberately go on to violate the Laws of God, and fet all around you an Example of it, merely to procure yourfelf more fpeedy Regard from the Profligate; or that you fhould keep yourfelf innocent, and re-

form

form them; the Effect of which will be, double Honour from them for the future? But after all, the real Truth is, that this Plea of commanding Respect, as well as the former of gaining Belief, is, generally speaking, mere Pretence: and they who alledge them, swear just as much, when they know they shall get neither.

But there is a third Inducement to it, which though not often mentioned perhaps, appears to have, with many, great Weight; an Opinion of its recommending them to the World, as being above precise Restraints, of a lively Conversation, and graceful Behaviour. Now it must be acknowledged, that a free Use of Oaths will help to acquit them from the Imputation of having any Religion. Not that Men are by any Means always so fearless of their Maker, as they give themselves Airs of being. And it is surely the lowest of Affectations, to make false Pretences to a Character, which, if it really belonged to them, could only dishonour them. For why they should, any of them, meet with more Regard from Men, for having no Regard to God and no Restraints on their Behaviour, but what they may boldly throw off, when it serves a present Turn; this is beyond all Comprehension. Observe too, that as it is wicked, for Believers in

in Religion to ſwear needleſsly; ſo it is abſurd, for Unbelievers to ſwear at all; and very diſhoneſt alſo, to offer an Oath for the Confirmation of what they ſay, when they themſelves muſt look upon it to be no Confirmation in the leaſt. As for the Notion that Oaths give a Life and Spirit to Diſcourſe; it muſt be confeſſed, that the whole Spirit of ſome Mens Converſation conſiſts in the Profaneneſs of it: and to refuſe them full Scope in the only Thing they have to be admired for, may ſeem ill-natured. But then it is ſo very eaſy to procure all the Admiration, that Swearing can give; an Attainment, which the meaneſt and ſtupideſt of human Creatures poſſeſs often in a ſupreme Degree; that one would think it ſhould not be mightily coveted. If this be all you have to make a Figure with, you will make a very poor one. And if you have any Thing better to value yourſelf upon, truſt to that: and leave ſuch as have no other, to ſhine with ſo cheap an Accompliſhment; which indeed, of all the Follies that ever made any Man's Converſation deſpicable and diſagreeable, is the very greateſt. And to ſee it in this Light; ſuppoſe a Dialogue were written down, as full of theſe Ornaments, as ſome Peoples Diſcourſe is, and you were to read

it

it over; what ſhould you think of it? Not only the Practice in general would appear monſtrouſly void of all Decency and Propriety, but the very Forms and Terms made uſe of errant groſs Nonſenſe. Still, ſome common Swearers may, in other Reſpects, be Men of good Underſtanding and good Breeding; but their Faults muſt not be taken for Excellencies; much leſs will they look becoming, when copied: and ſurely their Oaths are diſguſting, for ſtill further Reaſons. The aſſuming Air and Vehemence, that is inſeparable from them, expreſſes much Incivility and Diſreſpect. You never bear them from your Inferiors on that very Account. And yet, if it be ſuch graceful Language, why ſhould not your Children and Servants accoſt you with it, on all Occaſions? But plainly, as long as the Phraſes of this Kind have any Meaning, they have a ſhocking one: and when they have none they are mere Impertinence; which was never in any other Caſe, accounted a Beauty. Suppoſe you were to uſe in your Diſcourſe as many harmleſs Expletives, as you do of theſe profane ones; would not you be ridiculous, even to a Proverb? And yet there are not only no Words, but no inſignificant or inarticulate Sounds and Noiſes, but might, with juſt as much Senſe and

 Elegance

Elegance, be brought into every Part of your Converſation, as the Oaths you are ſo fond of. And ſurely adding Impiety to Abſurdity, cannot make it leſs Abſurdity. One would hope, their being forbidden is not the Reaſon why you delight in them. If it be; think only, what a deliberate Diſobedience to God, and Defiance of his Authority, that implies. And if it be not, what Motive can you have, to let ſuch ugly Excreſcences deform your Talk?

But ſome alledge, in the fourth Place, that whether becoming or not, it is the Faſhion however, and that muſt be followed. But though much too common, it is by no Means univerſal. There are, God be thanked, great Numbers innocent of it, yet well eſteemed in the World, and the more for their Innocence, by all whoſe Eſteem is worth having; and ſo may you. But were the Exceptions fewer; muſt you needs prefer the Cuſtoms of the World before all common Senſe, before the Dictates of your Conſcience, before the Commands of your Maker? Think a little of the Matter. And remember too, the World hath many other bad Cuſtoms. Is it your Intention then, to comply with them all, and be completely profligate? If not, why do you comply with this? Other Sins you may be in-

ticed and perſuaded into; but no one, I preſume, will take much Pains in preſſing you to Curſe and Swear. And if the Practice be looked on by ſome with too much Indulgence, it is looked upon by none with Eſteem. Such Language may perhaps, in former Days, long ago, have been one Diſtinction of the upper Part of the World: and truly one, that did them little Credit, even then: but now, the very loweſt of Mankind are grown to be ſo throughly their Match at it; and the moſt vulgar Mouths have this whole Set of Phraſes in ſuch continual Uſe; that it is high Time for well bred Men to have done with them. But above all, the moſt diſtant Advances, towards any Sort of Profaneneſs in Diſcourſe, ſhould be ſcrupulouſly avoided by that Sex, which cannot yet plead any eſtabliſhed Cuſtom for it; and whoſe Eſteem from the other depends ſo very greatly on the Gentleneſs and Delicacy of their Converſation, that they will be far from finding their Account, (whatever they may fancy) in exchanging it for a confident Behaviour, and offenſive Expreſſions of maſculine Boldneſs.

But fifthly; ſome have yet a different Plea to make. It is not the Practice of the World that they inſiſt on; but Swearing is unhappily be-

come their own Practice: and long Habit hath made it quite familiar to them, and a Thing of Course. What you urge therefore, in Alleviation of your Crime, is, that you have been for very many Years very constantly guilty of it. And is not this, on the contrary, one of the greatest Aggravations, that can be? Suppose you had lived, as perhaps you have, in the habitual Commission of several other Sins besides; is that a Reason, why you should go on with them all, and be easy about them; or a strong Reason, why you should be deeply concerned for them, and set in Earnest to amend without Delay? But you can alledge, it may be, that you learnt it before you knew the Harm of it; and indeed were taught it by the Example of those, who should have taught you better Things. Why, undoubtedly their setting you such a Pattern was some Excuse for you at first: but your following it to this Day, and setting others the same, is void of all Excuse. And what do you mean to do in the Case? You will not say, that you never design to reform; but will indulge yourself, to your dying Hour, in what God hath forbidden you. And if not, do you expect, that what Custom hath made hard to leave off, longer Custom will make easy? When shall you do it,

if not now? But, very probably, you have one Thing farther to plead on this Head: that you ſcarce know when you ſwear. And ſuppoſing this true, what doth it prove, but how great and old a Sinner, in this Way, you have been? Men may accuſtom themſelves to many Faults, and thoſe very groſs ones, till, at laſt they commit them without reflecting upon it almoſt at all. But do you think, they may ſafely commit them for that Reaſon; or, that they ought to mind better what they do? And obſerve, a Habit of Swearing is the leſs excuſable on this Account: becauſe there is nothing in our Frame, that originally tempts us to it. Other Sins are deeply rooted in the Conſtitution of Man; have much Pleaſure and Profit, at leaſt great Appearances of it, frequently attending them: profane Language hath neither. Still, we are not to indulge even the Vices, that are born with us: but much leſs one, to which Nature doth not prompt us; and which therefore we may, if we will, very eaſily, both avoid at firſt, and lay aſide afterwards. A little Attention is almoſt the whole we need for the Cure: and ſurely our Maker hath a Right to this from us. The greateſt Swearer that ever was, can abſtain from Oaths in the Preſence of thoſe, before whom he thinks

them improper; and can expect, that his Inferiors should abstain from them in his Presence, be they ever so much addicted to them. Why then is not the Presence of God to be equally reverenced? And what Impossibility is there, of paying as great a Regard to him, as we do to one another? The Force of Habit therefore, though a powerful Motive to beware of falling into this Sin, is no Argument at all for continuing in it.

There is yet remaining a sixth, and the last Plea I shall mention, made by some for themselves, that they do not swear commonly; scarce ever indeed, but when they are provoked, and Passion gets the better of them. Now this, it must be owned, is a strong Temptation, and therefore they hope no small Excuse. But consider: it is only Custom which hath made it a Temptation: a Person, who had not learnt to swear at such Times, would never think of it. Besides, is every one to be excused for doing every Thing that his Passions tempt him to? We have many other Passions, as well as Anger, that tempt us to do ill. If one makes a Sin excusable, why not another? And where shall we stop? But even as to this Passion; suppose a Murderer should plead, that he never killed a Man in cold Blood, but only when he was angry;

angry; would this avail him? When Men are moved by Refentment, are they to give it full Scope? are they to vent it in every Way they pleafe? efpecially in fuch Ways, as muft increafe it? For were you defirous to excite Rage within yourfelf to the very utmoft, what could you do more effectual, than blow up the flame by vehement Oaths and Imprecations? You find therefore, that St. *James*, writing to Perfons, who fuffered under very provoking ill Ufage, gives them particularly this Caution: *But above all Things, my Brethren, Swear not*[h]. Undoubtedly, being furprized by fudden Warmth, and hurried at once into a Sin, is fome Mitigation of it. But you cannot fay you are furprized into what you are conftantly ready to practife, as often as any Incitement to it comes in your Way. Inftead therefore of feeking Excufes for doing Wrong in this Matter; feek, what are the beft Means to enable you to do Right. And for your Affiftance in it, I now proceed to the

V. Head propofed: which was to give fome plain Directions for the Prevention or Cure of this great Fault.

And in the firft Place, to avoid Swearing in Anger, avoid being in Anger: keep your Tem-

[h] James v. 12.

per even and composed, by all the Considerations, that Reason and Religion can suggest. Or, if you cannot help being ruffled, and feel that improper Expressions are struggling for Utterance, oblige yourself to Silence; utter nothing at all, turn aside, and quit the Company for a while, if there be Need: for thus, in all Likelihood, you will escape more Sins and Dangers, than one. But, to secure you farther at all Times: Recollect frequently what you have heard and read and been convinced of, concerning this Practice; the Impiety, the Mischievousness, the Indecency, the Contemptibleness of it; with the utter Vanity of the Excuses alledged for it. But above all, possess your Heart with a serious Regard to God: think of him often and reverently; and you will soon cease, to mention him irreverently. Have it ready upon your Mind; he, that hath said, *Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain*, hath said also, *The Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his Name in vain*: he that hath said, *Swear not at all*[i], hath said also, *If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments*[k]. Further yet: Abstain, as much as possible, from all Company, that will set you the Example of profane

[i] Matth. v. 34. [k] Matth. xix. 17.

Language;

Language: and be aſſured, that keeping yourſelf innocent in this Reſpect will by no Means be the only Benefit you will receive from that Caution. But if you muſt converſe with ſuch, be doubly on your Guard before them; and if they attempt to ridicule your Strictneſs, give your Reaſons, where there is Hope of doing Good: where there is none, endeavour to turn the Diſcourſe, and hear as little upon the Subject, as you can: but what you muſt hear, bear it mildly, and reſolutely. One ſhould think, it might ſuffice Men to diſhonour God themſelves, without driving others, by Scoffs and Railleries, to do it againſt their Will. But if ſuch Treatment doth befall you; remember always, what your Lord and Maſter hath declared: *Whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me and of my Words, in this adulterous and ſinful Generation; of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father with the holy Angels*[l]. *But whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before Men, him will I confeſs alſo before my Father, which is in Heaven*[m]. At the ſame time Time, endeavour to ſhelter yourſelf under the Protection, and good Counſel, of ſome prudent and ſerious Friend. Surely you are not ſo unhappy, as to have none.

[l] Mark viii. 38. [m] Matth. x. 32.

If

If you are, it is high Time you made one. Let him encourage, and watch over, your Innocence; let him remonſtrate to you, if you become guilty. And in that Caſe, acknowledge your Senſe of the Fault before any fit Perſons, that hear you commit it; authorize them to remind you of it: theſe Things will tie you down to avoid it. Or, if more be needful, lay a Penalty upon yourſelf for each Offence: do ſome Act of Mortification, or of Charity, to fix the Senſe of your Tranſgreſſion deeper in your Mind. And make it a Rule, to abſtain, not only from the more ſhocking Sort of Oaths and Imprecations, but from palliating them under ſilly Diſguiſes; or uſing others in their Stead, that are gentler: for beſides that they will lead you to worſe, they are bad in themſelves. Our Saviour you know expreſſly forbids ſwearing *by Heaven*, *by the Earth*, by any of the pretended harmleſs Forms: and gives a Reaſon for it, which a Heathen Writer, who lived after him, gives too; that tho' none of them named God, they all of them referred to him [a]. They can have no other Senſe: and he will underſtand them in this. Indeed Expreſſions, which taken

[a] *Ulpian* ſaith, that they who uſe ſuch Forms, *reſpectu divini numinis jurant.*

ſtrictly

ſtrictly may not be Oaths, yet, if they bear the Reſemblance of Oaths, ought to be ſhunned, as *Appearances of Evil*[*]: for whoever goes as near, as he can, towards Sin; will ſeldom fail of making one Step farther, and falling into it. Nay, any careleſs, and eſpecially ludicrous Mention of God in Diſcourſe, be it ever ſo remote from Swearing, is undeniably *taking his Name in vain:* and irreverent Converſation about any Part of Religion, or any Thing connected with it, always brings on ſome Degree of Diſregard to its ever bleſſed Author and Object.

When once, by theſe or better Directions, you have reformed yourſelf; you may hope for Succeſs in the farther Duty of preſerving others innocent: which till then you will attempt with an exceeding ill Grace. And ſurely it muſt be a mortifying Situation, that Men dare not blame their very Children for Swearing, becauſe the Reproof would fly back into their own Faces. It is reported indeed, that there are Parents, who can rejoice in their Children's giving this early Proof of Manlineſs. And truly they had Need rejoice while they can. For ſuch an Education will ſoon bring forth other Fruits, beſides this,

[*] 1 Theſſ. v. 22.

that

that will turn their Mirth into Heavineſs enough. And then they will exclaim, and pretend to wonder, that the poor Wretches come out to be, what they have made them. Such, as would be happy, in their Children, muſt lay a Foundation for it early. And if to conduct them right, it be neceſſary to reform the reſt of your Family, and yourſelves too, it is only a double Reaſon for doing ſo, inſtead of an Objection againſt it.

But indeed moſt, if not all Men, may go, at leaſt occaſionally, much farther; and check profane Language in other Places, beſides their own Homes. A mere Look of Surprize, Diſapprobation, or Sorrow, on hearing it, will often have a great Effect. And without the leaſt Violation of good Manners, but treating thoſe with much Regard, who are pleaſed to treat God with none, various Methods may be found of ſometimes plainly declaring, ſometimes obliquely intimating, the manifold Wrongneſs of ſuch Expreſſions. There is indeed one Thing, that would ſeem to be of this Kind, and hath a contrary Effect: I mean, when Swearers are chid abſolutely in Jeſt; in a Way, that makes it viſible, they are not in the leaſt worſe thought of; and they perhaps carry on the Jeſt, by begging Pardon

Pardon of the Company, and doing the ſame Thing again the next Minute; without having it once brought to their Thoughts, that they have Cauſe either to beg Pardon of God, or be aſhamed of themſelves. Such a Farce of Reproof encourages, inſtead of diſcountenancing, the Sin. But a real and ſerious Diſlike, ſhewn with Diſcretion, and requiſite Mildneſs, may do incredible Service, to young Offenders above all. And therefore, whoever wiſhes well to his Acquaintance and Friends, to Religion and Virtue; eſpecially, whoever hath any peculiar Ground to hope he may have Weight; ſhould conſcientiouſly make uſe of every Opportunity for promoting right Behaviour, in this and all Reſpects: knowing, that he, *who converteth a Sinner from the Error of his Way, ſhall ſave a Soul from Death, and ſhall hide a Multitude of Sins*[p].

[p] James v. 20.

SER-

SERMON XVI.

GAL. v. 24.

And they, that are Chriſt's, have crucified the Fleſh, with the Affections and Luſts.

THIS Expreſſion, *Crucifying the Fleſh*, may probably ſeem to moſt, when they firſt hear it, or attend to it, a very ſtrange one: as, no doubt, Numbers of others in Scripture do. But a little Conſideration will ſhew, that there is no Cauſe to cenſure them, or be offended at them. For amidſt the Multiplicity of Languages, that are in the World, and the various Notions, Tempers, and Circumſtances, of the People who are bred up to uſe them; it is unavoidable, but there will be in each many Ways of ſpeaking, which though eaſy and familiar by Cuſtom to one Part of Mankind, muſt yet, to the Reſt, appear harſh and unaccountable. This is the Caſe even of neighbouring

bouring Countries in our own Times: much more then muſt it be expected in thoſe Tongues, of which the vulgar Uſe hath long ſince failed, and which formerly expreſſed the Sentiments of diſtant Nations, inſpired both by the Age and the Climate they lived in, with a different Turn of Thought and Stile. Hence proceeds the ſurprizing Warmth, and Boldneſs of Figure, the abrupt Tranſitions, the ſudden lofty Flights of the Eaſtern Writers and Speakers, utterly contrary to the cool and regular Genius of the *European* Languages. And amongſt the former, the Compoſitions of the *Jews* muſt of Courſe have a peculiar Tincture and Propriety of their own: not only becauſe they were prohibited, for good Reaſons, all needleſs Commerce with other Lands; but chiefly becauſe divine Revelation delivered to them ſuch Doctrines and Precepts, and conſequently ſuch Terms, as the Heathen had not; which muſt likewiſe greatly increaſe in Number by frequent References to their own Articles of Faith, Obſervances, and ſacred Books. When Chriſtianity was publiſhed to the World, here was again a new Set of Diſcoveries and Ideas, added to the preceding: which being firſt communicated in *Hebrew*, were

were thence transfufed into *Greek*, by the Apoftles addreffing themfelves to the Gentiles. Thus was the Stile of the New Teftament produced: which being as literally tranflated, and clofely imitated, as it well could, (for the Nature of the Thing required Strictnefs) the fame Forms of Speech have been derived down into the modern Tongues of Chriftian Countries. And fo it hath come to pafs by a Kind of Neceffity, that, in Difcourfes on Religion, Words, Meanings, Conftructions, Images, occur, extremely remote from the common Idiom of the Language on other Occafions. And thefe, weak Perfons are apt to miftake, artful Difputants to pervert, and unlearned or unfair Affecters of Wit and free Thought to ridicule; though originally they were of plain Signification, and are ftill, when underftood, full of good Senfe and Beauty.

Thus, *Crucifying*, or as the Apoftle elfewhere puts it, *Mortifying*[a] the Flefh, is a Phrafe far out of the Road of our daily Converfation, and of our Reading on Subjects of Bufinefs and Entertainment: from whence it eafily happens, that the Superftitious mifapprehend, and the Profane defpife it; though

[a] Col. iii. 5.

indeed it denotes a reasonable, a necessary Duty, and describes that Duty, not only in a strong, but elegant Manner. To shew these Things clearly, I shall

I. Explain to you the Rise and general Intention of this Way of speaking.

II. Specify more distinctly the Nature of the Duty designed to be taught by it.

III. Shew you how strictly our belonging to Christ obliges us to practise that Doctrine.

I. I shall explain to you the Rise and general Intention of this Way of speaking in Scripture.

Now the Words, *Flesh* and *Spirit*, though employed by the Writers of the New Testament in different Senses, according to the Subject of which they treat, are yet commonly Expressions of the moral State and Character of Man; the Dispositions of his Heart towards Piety or Sin. *Spirit* is the Principle of Reason and Religion: *Flesh* of Appetite and Passion. Every one feels in himself both right and wrong Inclinations. The former our Conscience approves. And therefore pursuing them would on that Account alone be properly called, *Walking* after *the Spirit*[b], that *inward Man, which* naturally *delighteth in the Law of*

[b] Rom. viii. 4.

God[c]. But a much ſtronger Ground for it is, that the Divine Spirit hath not only revealed to us the whole Rule of Life, and the moſt powerful Motives to obſerve it, but is continually preſent to our Minds, exciting and ſtrengthening us, if we permit him, to every good Work. On the other Hand, *all Fleſh having corrupted his Way before God*[d], Sinners may be juſtly ſaid to *walk* after *the Fleſh*, becauſe they live conformably to the wicked Cuſtoms of the World. But the true Foundation of the Phraſe is, that this *corruptible Body*[e] ſubjects the fallen Children of *Adam* perpetually by its irregular Propenſities, to a Variety of Temptations, hard to be overcome. And therefore even Heathen Authors have repreſented it, as the principal Source of moral Evil: no wonder then, that thoſe of Scripture do, on fuller Knowledge of the Caſe.

But in St. *Paul* more eſpecially the *Fleſh* means our vicious Tendencies; not only thoſe to ſenſual Indulgence, but the whole Syſtem of them. Thus Ver. 13. of this Chapter: *Brethren, ye have been called unto Liberty; only uſe not your Liberty for an Occaſion to the Fleſh:* that is, to any blameable Purpoſe. But the par-

c Rom. vii. 22. d Gen. vi. 11, 12. e Wiſd. ix. 15.

ticular blameable Uſe, which he had in View, was that of uncharitable Contention. For it follows immediately, *But if ye bite and devour one another, take Heed that ye be not conſumed one of another.* Again, Ver. 19. having ſaid, that *the Works of the Fleſh are manifeſt*, he proceeds to reckon amongſt them, not only *Adultery and Laſciviouſneſs*, but *Variance, Envy, Strife, Sedition*. And the *Fruits of the Spirit*, oppoſed to theſe, Ver. 22. *are* not only *Temperance*, but *Long-ſuffering, Peace, Goodneſs, Faith*, or *Fidelity, Meekneſs*.

Farther: becauſe there is a Connexion and Sympathy between the various Diſpoſitions of the ſame Kind, whether moral or immoral, each adding Vigour and Strength to the other: the ſeveral Vices, to which Mankind is prone, are deſcribed in God's Word, as uniting into and forming a living Body, hence denominated *the Body of Sin*, or of *the Luſts of the Fleſh* [f]; of which every criminal Inclination is a Member. Thus, when the Apoſtle had enjoined Chriſtians to *mortify their Members, which are upon the Earth* [g], he inſtantly explains himſelf to mean the Parts of this figurative Body of Sin, which he goes on to enumerate: *Covetouſneſs*,

[f] Col. ii. 11. [g] Col. iii. 5.

toufnefs, Anger, Fornication, Uncleannefs, Malice, Blafphemy.

And, in Confequence of this, becaufe not only the Nature of all Men is tainted originally, but the Conduct of moft Men hath, in fome Refpects at leaft, been habitually unjuftifiable; therefore the Sins, which they have indulged, confidered in the Manner above mentioned, as united into one organized Body, are alfo ftiled in Scripture, *the old Man:* in Oppofition to that *new Man*, or bleffed Change of Temper and Behaviour, which the Gofpel was defigned to produce. And however fingular the former of thefe Phrafes may appear; the latter, which in itfelf is equally fo, that of becoming a new Man, is both frequent in our common Speech, and warranted by the politeft of claffical Authors.

This Expreffion therefore having taken Place, the Amendment of our Hearts and Actions is fometimes denoted by laying afide or *putting off this old Man.* Thus *Eph.* iv. 22. *That ye put off, concerning the former Converfation, the old Man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful Lufts; and put on the new Man, which is created according to God,* that is, according to the Image of God, *in Righteoufnefs*

and true Holineſs. And becauſe our gracious Redeemer was a perfect Example of theſe, putting on the new Man is elſewhere called, *putting on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt*[h]: a Mode of Speech fully vindicated by the ancient Uſage of the *Greek* Tongue, in which the New Teſtament was written. For in that, *putting on any Perſon* ſignified, forming ones ſelf by his Character, and imitating his Manner.

At other Times, this intire Change of Affections, Will, and Demeanour, is expreſſed more ſtrongly. We are ſaid to *be dead to Sin*, and *raiſed up again to walk in Newneſs of Life*[i]: which means, to be ſeparated for ever from bad Habits and Cuſtoms, and enter into a different State, and Courſe, of thinking and acting; in which *the former Things are paſſed away, and all Things are made new*[k]. The Promiſes indeed, of this Renovation on our Part, and of Grace to accompliſh it, and future Happineſs to reward it, on God's Part, are firſt made in Baptiſm: which therefore the Scripture[l] calls our new Birth to this new Life. But then, it is only by continual Care, (if Providence allows us Time) to grow in Grace, and become

[h] Rom. xiii. 14. Gal. iii 27 [i] Rom. vi. 2, 4.
[k] Rev. xxi. 4, 5. [l] John iii. 3—7.

every

every Day more completely dead to all Transgreſſion, and alive to all Duty, that we ſhall arrive at the Maturity, requiſite for our Acceptance.

Farther yet: when the Word of God intends to give us the moſt awakening Senſe, how intire our Change muſt be, and with how unremitted a Reſolution we muſt arm ourſelves againſt every bad Inclination; then the Expreſſion choſen is, not that of dying to Sin, but of *mortifying*, killing it. For the original Signification of the Words, tranſlated, *mortify*, is not the now common one, of keeping under, and treating with ſome Auſterity, but of deſtroying, putting to Death: as where the Apoſtle ſaith, *If through the Spirit ye do mortify the Deeds of the Body*, unlawful Indulgences, *ye ſhall live*[m]; and in the Paſſage already cited, *mortify therefore your Members, which are upon the Earth*. In Purſuance of which mortal Enmity between Religion and Wickedneſs, every ſerious Believer conſiders himſelf as a *Soldier of Chriſt*[n], whoſe whole Life is to be a Warfare againſt thoſe *Luſts which war againſt the Soul*[o].

And laſtly, becauſe the great End of our Saviour's Incarnation and Death was to en-

[m] Rom. viii. 13. [n] 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4. [o] 1 Pet. ii. 11.

gage us in this good Fight, and enable us to obtain the Victory; therefore overcoming and sacrificing to him our unlawful Desires, is, by an elegant Allusion to the Manner of his Death, (which was painful and slow, like our Extirpation of them) called *Crucifying* them; not only here in the Text, but in another parallel one; *Knowing this, that our old Man is crucified with him, that the Body of Sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve Sin* [p]. Whence also our Apostle saith farther, that *by the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, by the Example of his Sufferings, and the Grace which they have procured, *the World is crucified unto him, and he unto the World* [q]. He regards it no more, than the *Jews* did our Saviour, when they condemned him to the most ignominious Torments, but hates it mortally, and despises it utterly, so far as it is sinful: and is content, that, in return, it should hate and despise him, rather than comply with its wicked Customs.

This then is the true Christian Mortification. And the Figures, describing it, are indeed remarkably bold and full of Energy: but they are accurate, instructive, animating; and alas, but too necessary, to convince unthinking and

[p] Rom. vi. 6. [q] Gal. vi. 14.

unwilling

unwilling Creatures, as we are, (prone to explain away into nothing every Precept we can) of the Zeal and Severity, with which we are to extirpate all that is faulty within our Souls. The Commands of our Blessed Lord himself carry in them the same Force: *If our right Hand offends us, to cut it off; if our right Eye, to pluck it out*[r]: if any Desire we feel, will be a probable Occasion of our falling, to suppress it, however dear; if any Action we are engaged in, to quit it, however advantageous in other Respects. And the Reason he adds, admits of no Reply. *It is better for thee to enter into Life maimed, than having two Hands or two Eyes, to be cast into Hell-Fire:* it is better to undergo the most painful Self-Denial here, and be recompensed with heavenly Felicity hereafter; than to enjoy the *Pleasures of Sin for a Season*[s], and suffer the Vengeance of the Almighty for ever.

Having now explained the Rise and general Intention of the principal Phrases of this Sort in Scripture, I proceed

II. To specify more distinctly the Nature of the Duty designed to be taught by them.

And here you cannot fail to perceive at first Sight, that harsh Treatment of our bodily

[r] Matth. v. 29, 30. xviii. 8, 9. Mark ix. 43, 45, 47.
[s] Heb. xi. 25.

Frame, only for the ſake of treating it harſhly, is no Part of Chriſtian Mortification, or Chriſtian Duty. It is indeed a Practice contrary to Reaſon, and no leſs to Scripture. For St. *Paul* ſaith, *no Man*, that is, no wiſe Man, *ever hated his own Fleſh*[t]. Yet the Opinion, that ſuch Things are in themſelves acceptable to God, hath not only been common in falſe Religions, but crept into the true: and both furniſhed Unbelievers with an Objection againſt it, and miſled Believers very unhappily. For they, who fancy, that exerciſing Rigour on their Perſons hath any Good in it, ſeparate from the good Uſes to which it may contribute, are ſome of them led to fancy alſo, that the farther they carry it the better; till they hurt, perhaps ruin, their Healths, diſorder their Underſtandings, or however ſour their Tempers: while others conceive, that there is very great Merit, in a very little Suffering; and conſequently perſuade themſelves, that God will readily excuſe the ſmaller Faults of a Behaviour not quite ſo moral as it ſhould be; on their punctual Performance of theſe higher Duties, as they eſteem them; though, in Truth, not only imaginary, but often of little more than imaginary Hardſhip. And thus, whereas com-

[t] Eph. v. 29.

mon Sinners are open to Remorſe of Conſcience, which there is Hope may, ſooner or later, through the Grace of God, amend them: theſe, on the contrary, proceed Self-applauded, and fully perſuaded of their Title to a diſtinguiſhed Share of Divine Favour. On which Account our Saviour tells the Phariſees, Men of Auſterity in ſome Reſpects, and wonderous Exactneſs in little Matters, that *the Publicans and the Harlots ſhall go into the Kingdom of Heaven before them* [v].

Not that Chriſtians, of more abſtemious Lives than ordinary, are therefore to be condemned as Phariſees and Hypocrites; or derided, as weak and ſuperſtitious. Every one is bound to employ ſuch Means for his Preſervation from Sin, and Advancement in Piety and Virtue, as either God's Word hath preſcribed, or his own Reaſon and Experience recommend. Now ſome may find Rules to be uſeful or neceſſary, which to others would be neither. Some again may raſhly cenſure what they would do much better to imitate. And all Perſons, but eſpecially all who live in Eaſe and Plenty, ſhould be attentive to *keep their Bodies in Subjection* [w]: not haraſſing them as Enemies, but ruling and providing for them as Servants,

[v] Matth. xxi. 31. [w] 1. Cor. ix. 27.

in ſuch Manner as to make them both willing to obey, and able to perform their Work. They ſhould watch over their natural Fondneſs for Pleaſure, and Tendency to follow the Cuſtoms of the World; not with unreaſonable Scrupulouſneſs, but with religious Prudence: learn to ſuſpect their favourite Inclinations, and the Opinions that countenance them: check themſelves in Proportion as they grow eager, ſtop and look round them with Care: never adventure to the Extremity of what is lawful, but in all dubious Caſes lean to the undoubtedly ſafer Side: be moderate in the moſt allowable Gratifications of this World, and delight principally in cultivating and improving thoſe pious and virtuous Affections, which alone can *make them meet to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light*[x]; of a Happineſs intirely ſpiritual, and abſtracted from Fleſh and Blood.

But then, while we obſerve this Caution in regard to worldly Objects, we muſt be careful alſo, on the other Hand, that we carry it not to dangerous or extravagant Lengths; that we ſeem not unthankful to, or ſuſpicious of him, *who hath given us richly all Things to enjoy*[y]; that we diſguiſe not Religion by putting it in a melancholy and forbidding Dreſs; that we be

[x] Col. i. 12. [y] 1 Tim. vi. 17.

not betrayed by the Reſtraints, under which we lay ourſelves, either into vain Self-opinion and ſpiritual Pride, or a Rigidneſs of Temper, very unſuitable to the gentle Spirit of the Chriſtian Profeſſion: but particularly, that we forbear to condemn, or even deſpiſe, our Brethren of more ſeeming Latitude; who, it may be under the Appearance of a freer Life, (which was our Saviour's own Caſe, for he *came eating and drinking* [z]) preſerve really and inwardly a ſtricter Guard over their Thoughts, Words, and Actions, than we do. And in general, all Perſons ought to take Heed, that while they are watching againſt the Approach of one Sort of Sins, thoſe of another do not find a ready Admiſſion. We are willing enough to keep at ever ſo great a Diſtance from the Faults, to which we have little or no Inclination; and often affect to make our Zeal in that reſpect remarkable: but then perhaps more favourite Vices have eaſy Entrance into our Breaſts, and take firm Poſſeſſion of them. We are ſhocked, for Inſtance, and with much Cauſe, at the monſtrous and ruinous Eagerneſs for Pleaſure, the profligate and unprecedented Contempt of Religion, that prevails in the World: our Behaviour, on theſe Heads, is unblameable, ex-

[z] Matth. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.

emplary;

emplary; and we value ourſelves upon it beyond Bounds. Yet poſſibly, all the while, we indulge ourſelves to the full another Way: are unjuſt and fraudulent, or ſelfiſh and unreaſonable, or penurious and hard-hearted, or cenſorious and unforgiving, or peeviſh and ill-tempered; make every one about us uneaſy, and thoſe chiefly, whoſe Happineſs ought to be our firſt Care. This is applauding ourſelves for being fortified, where the Enemy is not likely to make an Attack: and leaving the Places, that are moſt expoſed, quite undefended. Every one therefore ought to ſtudy the weak Parts of his own Heart and Conduct, and ſpend the main of his Attention upon theſe: that ſo not only a wrong Inclination or two may be rooted up, (which if left to themſelves would ſcarce grow) or may be ſacrificed in favour of others as bad; but the whole *Body of Sin* be deſtroyed; the *Fleſh*, the Principle of Evil, *with* all *its Affections and Luſts*, nailed to the Croſs of Chriſt.

And this Duty of Mortification is no more confined to one Seaſon, than to one Sin. The Practice of it either muſt be conſtant, or will be fruitleſs. The Time of Lent indeed hath been more eſpecially appropriated to it: not that we ſhould think the Shew, or the Reality, of a little more Exactneſs than ordinary, for a few

few Weeks, (productive perhaps only of ill Humour) so meritorious; that when we have once got it over, we may live almost as we please, till the unwelcome Days return, when we are to atone afresh for our past Offences, and so make Way for the Commission of future ones. For, as the Son of *Sirach* observes, *He, that washeth himself after the touching of a dead Body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? So is it with a Man, that fasteth for his Sins, and goeth again and doth the same. Who will hear his Prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him*[a]? Our great Concern is to mortify all irregular Desires with such incessant Care, that there may be as little Need, as little Room, as possible, to distinguish one Season from another in that Respect. But because we are strangely apt to postpone a Work, generally disagreeable in proportion as it is necessary; our Church hath wisely directed, that the Negligent, (and we all are such in some Measure) should now be more solemnly called to consider their Ways, afflict their Souls for their Transgressions, and renew the intermitted Discipline which is requisite to make their Hearts better. This is our true Business at present. Methods of keeping Lent, which end with it,

[a] Ecclus xxxiv. 25, 26.

and

and leave behind them no durable Effect, cannot be of much Use; and may be fatal, by deceiving us into a false Security, and Forgetfulness of what I proposed to shew you,

III. That our Christian Profession strongly binds us to mortify continually every immoral Appetite and Passion. *They, that are Christ's, have crucified the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts.*

Instead of this, the Apostle might have said, (like the Philosophers of his own and preceding Times) they who are truly rational Beings, who see the Beauty of Virtue and Deformity of Vice, who feel the Pleasures and the Pains of the moral Sense, who form just Notions of the real Good and Evil of Man, who are ambitious of imitating their Creator and acquiring his Favour in their present State of Existence and perhaps a future one: but in saying, *they who are Christ's*, he hath said all this, and much more. Christianity comprehends every Consideration of Nature and Reason in the fullest Manner; and as they are all insufficient, some too speculative and unaffecting, some too disputable and uncertain; adds others of inestimable Value, peculiar to itself. A Heathen may want almost intirely, and must want in a great Degree, both the Means of learning what

Mankind

Mankind is moſt deeply intereſted in, and Motives and Power to practiſe what he hath learned: a Chriſtian, allowed to read and hear the Word of God, cannot, without inexcuſable Negligence: and *of them to whom much is given, much will be required*[b]. Through Chriſt, who hath enlightened us, we *know all Things*[c]; *through Chriſt which ſtrengtheneth us, we can do all Things*[d]: through Chriſt, who died for us, what we do ſhall be rewarded, though deſerving nothing, with eternal Life. And thus hath *the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation*, not only *taught*, but enabled us, *denying Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, to live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent World*[e]. They, who are Chriſt's in *Name* only, bind themſelves to this: they, who are in Reality his, perform it. *If any Man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his*[f]: and *the Fruits of the Spirit*, we are told immediately before the Text, and through the whole Scripture, are the pious Movements of a good Heart, and the Actions of a good Life. Our bleſſed Lord *gave himſelf for us, that he might ſanctify and cleanſe us, and preſent us to himſelf holy and without Blemiſh*[g]. If then we

[b] Luke xii. 48. [c] 1 John ii. 20. [d] Phil. iv. 13.
[e] Tit. ii. 11, 12. [f] Rom. viii. 9. [g] Eph. v. 25, 26, 27.

labour not to become ſuch, we fruſtrate, ſo far as our own Concern reaches, his gracious Intentions, and make his Sufferings vain. If we crucify not our Affections and Luſts, *we crucify him afreſh, and put him to open ſhame*[h]; pour Contempt on his glorious Undertaking ourſelves, and expoſe it to the Scorn of others: the Conſequence of which will be, that, as *while we profeſs to know him, in Works we deny him*[i], ſo will he in the Day of Judgment *profeſs to us, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work Iniquity*[k]. Still it ſhould be obſerved, that ſo far both good and bad Chriſtians are his, as to be always under his Dominion. *None of us liveth to himſelf, and no Man dieth to himſelf,* exempted from his Authority: *whether we live or die, we are the Lord's*[l]; but the Wicked continue under his Government, juſt as upon Earth, Rebels continue Subjects; not intitled to Benefits from their Prince, but liable juſtly to ſorer Puniſhments, than his other Enemies. Think then, will you be *Chriſt's* at *his coming*[m], only to have *Vengeance taken of you in flaming Fire*[n], or to *enter with him into his Glory*[o]? If the latter be your Choice, the

[h] Heb. vi. 6. [i] Tit. i. 16. [k] Matt. vii. 23. [l] Rom. xiv. 7, 8. [m] 1 Cor. xv. 23. [n] 2 Theſſ. i. 8. [o] Luke xxiv. 26.

only

only Way to it is, that you think it not too much to crucify your Flesh figuratively, renounce and destroy your forbidden Desires, however painful it be, for him; since he thought it not too much to let his Flesh literally be crucified for you. And if you will make sure of doing this at all, you must do it immediately.

Perhaps you will say, we hope it is done already: for the Text assures us, all Believers have done it. But observe: at that Time almost all professed Believers were real ones; for they had no Temptation to make a false Profession: and in general, speculative Believers were practical ones; else they would never have suffered what they did. But in our Times, the Case is much altered. And in all Times, the true Method of arguing is, not, *we are Christ's*, and therefore we *have crucified our Affections and Lusts*: but, *we have crucified our Affections and Lusts*, and therefore *we are Christ's*. Our Faith must be proved from our Works: not our Works from our Faith. *By their Fruits ye shall know them*, is the Rule[p]: and by those we must know our own State, as well as that of others. But supposing we have Cause to believe it good, have we not greater Cause to

[p] Matth. vii. 20.

be ſenſible it is not perfect? And ſhould we not be ſtriving continually to make it more ſo? *They that are Chriſt's*, the Apoſtle tells us, *have crucified the Fleſh*. But he doth not tell us, they have done it ſo effectually and ſo completely, as they ought. On the contrary he tells us, that he himſelf had *not* yet *attained*, but was ſtill *preſſing on towards the Mark* [q]. And ſurely we ſhould be doing it without ceaſing. Unleſs we are careful to advance, we ſhall be driven back; unleſs we purſue our Enemy to Deſtruction; though put to Flight, he will return: though *wounded* as it were *to Death, his deadly Wound will be healed* [r]: and gradually, if not ſuddenly, his Empire may become more abſolute, and our Condition more deplorable, than ever. At leaſt he will be perpetually annoying us, diſturbing our Peace, taking away our Comfort, darkening our Proſpects. Nor ſhall we be Loſers in this Life only, by Neglect of going on to Perfection: but in the next alſo, the leſs complete the Victory is, the ſmaller will be the Reward: and they *who have ſown ſparingly, ſhall reap alſo ſparingly* [s]. Let us therefore ſow plentifully the Seeds of every Virtue; and extirpate

[q] Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14. [r] Rev. xiii. 3. [s] 2 Cor. ix. 6.

with

with ſuch Diligence every *Root of Bitterneſs*, that there may be the freeſt Room and the fulleſt Nouriſhment for every Grace of the Chriſtian Life to flouriſh, and be fruitful. *Of ourſelves* indeed *we can do nothing*[t]. But this is far from being a juſt Plea for ſtopping where we are: ſince *God is able to make all Grace abound towards us; that we having always all Sufficiency in all Things, may abound to every good Work*[u]. Provided then we apply to him, by the Means he hath appointed, and engaged to bleſs, humble Faith, earneſt Prayer, ſtrict Vigilance, and conſtant Uſe of his holy Ordinances, we ſhall not fail to experience the Truth of his Promiſe: *They, that wait upon the Lord, ſhall renew their Strength: they ſhall mount up with Wings, as Eagles; they ſhall run, and not be weary; they ſhall walk, and not faint*[w].

[t] John xv. 5. [u] 2 Cor. ix. 8. [w] Iſ. xl. 31.

SERMON XVII.

HEB. xi. 17.

By Faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he, that had received the Promises, offered up his only begotten Son.

THE Character of *Abraham* in general is represented throughout the Word of God, as highly respectable. But his Obedience to the Divine Command, in devoting to Death, and sacrificing, so far as the Act of the Mind was concerned, his beloved Son, the only Heir of his Family, and of all the gracious Predictions made to him, is peculiarly celebrated for its transcendent Piety; first in the Old Testament, by an Angel from Heaven, speaking in the Name of God; then in the New, by the Apostle St. *James*, as well as the Writer of this Epistle. But as they, who look at the Sun too intently, dazzle their Eyes, till all around them, and even the Light itself, appears dark: so Men have strained their Thoughts, in com-

paring and meaſuring the Weakneſs of their own Faith and Reſolution againſt the Strength of *Abraham*'s, till they have been quite confounded with it. And hence ſome have imagined this Direction to be ſuch a one as could not poſſibly come from God: whilſt others have thought it was a Trial, rather of his Diſcernment, than of his Dutifulneſs; and that though he meant well, he might have reaſoned better. The former Opinion is deſigned to contradict and diſcredit Scripture: nor is the latter, though intended to remove an Objection againſt it, by any Means conſiſtent with it. For we ſhould never have found there ſuch lofty Encomiums of his proceeding ſo far, through Miſtake, towards an Action, which would have been extremely unnatural and barbarous, if the Injunction to do it, had not altered the Quality of it: but whatever kind Acknowledgement had been made of his good Purpoſe, there would certainly have been a Reproof of his wrong Judgment; at leaſt an Admonition, that it was wrong: whereas we find nothing but unmixed Commendation of his Behaviour. For the Sake therefore, both of ſuch as incline to either of theſe Notions, and of many humbler and devouter Minds;

who

who yet feel, (as perhaps we have now and then most of us done) great Reluctance in their Affections against this Article of sacred History, and some Difficulties in Point of Reason also: I shall endeavour to shew distinctly,

I. The Possibility of God's giving such an Order.

II. The Evidence, which *Abraham* had, and we may have now, of his actually giving it.

III. The Improbability, that the Obedience paid to it should have any bad Effect in after Times.

IV. The good Ends, that might be and were promoted by it.

I. The Possibility of God's giving such an Order.

Indeed, were we but nearly so modest as we ought to be, we should be very backward to question, whether a Being of unsearchable Wisdom can do what there is any competent Proof he hath done: and should carry a strong Sense of our own Short-sightedness and Incapacity along with us, to check all Petulance of arguing on such Points. But happily a moderate Submission of our poor Understandings to the Divine, will be sufficient on the Occasion before us.

That

That *the God of the Spirits of all Flesh*[a], *in whose Hand is the Soul of every living Thing, and the Breath of all Mankind*[b], may *take away* at his Pleasure what he hath *given* only during his Pleasure[c], cannot possibly be doubted. We experience, that in the daily Course of his Providence he takes away the most innocent, the most deserving, the most useful Persons, very unexpectedly, and, to our thinking, very unseasonably; for Causes not to be known till *the Day of the Revelation of his righteous Judgment*[d]. And, shocking as this may often seem, or afflicting as it may feel, it is yet no more than removing his Subjects, (in whom he hath absolute Property, and over whom he hath unlimited Authority) from one Part of his Dominions to another, still to remain under the same gracious Government, and only to serve in a different and better Station.

Now what he so continually doth by various Diseases, and what we call Accidents, (many of them attended with long and dreadful Sufferings) why might he not, if on any Occasion he saw it proper, do by a shorter and easier Method, by the Hands of another human

[a] Numb. xvi. 22. [b] Job xii. 10. [c] Ibid. i. 21.
[d] Rom. ii. 5.

Creature?

Creature? Magiſtrates appoint their Officers to execute thoſe, whom they have condemned. Kings and Generals appoint their Armies to deſtroy Multitudes, that are guiltleſs themſelves, though poſſibly involved in the Guilt of others. Killing would be Murder in both theſe Caſes, if a lawful Command did not alter the Nature of them. But that ſuperſedes and overrules the Obligations to the contrary, which elſe would ariſe from the common Relation of Man to Man. Surely then God might always give the ſame Command, whenever he thought fit to interpoſe. And the Perſon, who had his Authority, was well authorized, and bound to act according to his Commiſſion. Elſe not only *Abraham* would have acted unjuſtifiably in this Matter, but the *Jews* in making War on the *Canaanites*, *Jehu* in extirpating the Houſe of *Ahab*, many other Perſons in many other Things, all which, the Scripture ſaith, were done in Obedience to the Voice of Heaven. And the Conſequences of making theſe Conceſſions, (for we cannot ſtop at one) every ſerious Believer will ſee with Horror. But in Truth we need make none of them. If God cannot empower a Perſon to do any Thing, but what would be lawful without

out his Order, ſome of the loweſt of us have a Right to do more than he. And if he can empower in one ſuch Caſe, why not in all: in that of Life and Death, as well as the reſt?

Since then his mere Command given might oblige one Man to take away the Life of another: it might oblige a Father to take away the Life of his Son. For the particular Relation of Kindred, can no more be pleaded as a Ground of diſobeying the Divine Will, than the univerſal Relation of Humanity. We own, God hath enjoined Parents to love their Children: but not better, than they love their Maker. He hath planted in their Hearts Inſtincts of warm Affection towards them: but not to the Prejudice of their Duty towards himſelf. The Law of Nature, that of the Land, may require a Man to put his guilty Son to Death; to expoſe his innocent Son, for the needful Service of the Public, to unavoidable Deſtruction; nay, himſelf to fight againſt his Son, if they are Members of two Societies at War with each other. And why might not God require whatever of the like Sort he judged to be requiſite? The Magiſtrate's only Juſtification is, that he acts on the Authority of God, as declared by the Voice of Nature: and

and why is it not a ſufficient Juſtification, that *Abraham* acted upon the ſame Authority, as declared by the Voice of Revelation? One End of Sacrifices probably was, to recognize, that all Things are God's Gift, by ſurrendering ſome choice Parts of them to him in this Form. Now *Iſaac* had been the Gift of God in a moſt peculiar Senſe: his Parents had enjoyed the Comfort of him for many Years. And if he, who might have ſnatched him away before, whenever he would, by any of the common Methods, was pleaſed to demand him back at laſt by as extraordinary a one, as that in which he beſtowed him, what could be ſaid againſt it?.

I acknowledge, it may ſeem Hard-heartedneſs to argue in ſo rigid a Manner on ſo tender a Subject: and am very ſenſible, that there is no Poſſibility of conſidering *Abraham*'s Caſe as our own, nay of imagining it diſtinctly as his, without bleeding inwardly at the Thought; and rejoicing from ones Soul, that the Days of ſuch Commands are long ago paſt. But ſtill the Right of iſſuing them forth was ever inherent in God, and muſt be confeſſed, and when it is needful, vindicated. To this very Hour both Religion and Virtue call upon us frequently to controll and act againſt our moſt

affectionate inward Feelings, even towards them that are dearest to us; though not near to the same Degree, that *Abraham* did. And it is a very ungrateful Return, instead of thanking God, that he doth not carry our Trial so far, to insist that he cannot.

He cannot indeed require what is absolutely and always unfit: but taking away Life is fit or unfit, according to Circumstances. He cannot require a Parent to hate his Child: and it is the Height of infidel Perverseness, to interpret our Saviour's Words, of *hating Father and Mother and Wife and Children* [e], literally and strictly, when we have a plain Direction to interpret them comparatively [f]. But he may require a Parent, as we have daily Proof, willingly to yield up and resign his Child: and to offer him, is but one Step further, however painful a one. He cannot give Men a general Commission to take away each others Lives: for this would be inconsistent with the Scheme of his Providence, and destructive to Mankind. But he may give a particular Commission of that Sort in some extraordinary Juncture: for it may be to their Advantage. He cannot order a single Life to be taken away, or a single Action of any Kind to be done, without Reason; for it

[e] Luke xiv. 26. [f] Matth. x. 37.

would

would be contrary to the Perfection of his Nature. But he may have many Reasons utterly beyond our Reach. And to assert that he can have none, is to set up our own Understandings for infinite, and deny his to be such. Whether we can perceive any Reasons, and what, in the present Case, will be inquired under the fourth Head. It suffices for this first, that God might see Reasons to give forth the Command, which the Scripture saith he did. He saw indeed at the same Time Reasons against the Execution of it: as *Solomon* did against the Execution of his, though a very wise one, for the Division of the Child [g]. But *Abraham* could by no Means penetrate so far: and therefore was bound to obey, if on due Consideration he was sure he was ordered. Let us now then examine

II. What Evidence he might have of this, and we may have even now.

The Almighty and All-wise cannot be without some Way, probably many Ways, of notifying his Will, whatever it be, clearly to his Creatures: for even we can notify ours clearly, one to another. If an Equal of ours were to bid us do what *Abraham* was bidden; though we ought to refuse Obedience, yet we should not doubt, or we need not long doubt, who it was,

g 1 Kings iii. 25.

or

or what he ſaid. And why could not *Abraham* be equally certain; when God ſpoke to him? That we know not, how God ſhewed it to be himſelf, is no Argument in the leaſt, that he did not ſhew it effectually. If it were, it would be an Argument againſt all Revelation, as well as this. Some indeed have objected, that *Abraham* could not have ſo full Proof by any Revelation, that God enjoined him to ſacrifice his Son, as he had by Reaſon, that it was criminal. But, you have ſeen, he had no Proof of its being criminal, if God enjoined it: but full Proof of the contrary. And therefore the Objection, rightly ſtated, is only, that he had not ſo much Evidence of the Injunction, as he had, that the Action, unleſs it were enjoined, was unlawful. Now even this is more, than can ever be made out. But, ſuppoſing it: A Judge hath ſeldom or never ſuch abſolute Certainty of the Guilt of a Priſoner tried before him, as he hath, that unleſs he be guilty, he ſhould not condemn him. Yet ſtill, if the Evidence of his Guilt be ſufficient, he condemns him very juſtly. And ſo, if the Evidence of God's Command was ſufficient, *Abraham* very juſtly might have ſacrificed *Iſaac*. Let us therefore conſider, without Prejudice, whether it was or not: fairly taking the Caſe, as it lies in Scripture.

There

There we find, that he had enjoyed the Privilege of ſupernatural Communications from God, for above the Space of fifty Years: during which Time we have many of them recorded, and there might be many more. He had infallible Aſſurance, that they were true ones; not only from viſible Appearances of Angels, and of the Divine Glory, but from the punctual Accompliſhment of the Predictions contained in them: particularly, the Deſtruction of *Sodom*, and the Birth of *Iſaac*, in his and *Sarah*'s old Age; Events, which God alone could foreſee, or bring to paſs. And it was *after theſe Things*, as *Moſes* takes Care to give Notice expreſſly[h], that he was tried with the Command to offer up his Son. Now ſurely by ſo long Experience he was throughly qualified to diſtinguiſh real Revelations from imaginary ones. Nor would God either permit the Man, whom he honoured with the Title of *his Friend*[i], to be miſled into a horrible and moſt afflicting Crime, by a Deluſion of Satan, attended with all the external Marks of Truth; or deliver a Command to him of ſo extraordinary a Nature, and leave him doubtful of its Genuineneſs; but would certainly remove all poſſible Difficulty about believing it, when thoſe

[h] Gen. xxii. 1. [i] 2 Chron. xx. 7. Iſa. xli. 8. James ii. 23.

of obeying it were singly so hard to surmount. Indeed an Order, so strangely different from any that he had ever received, and which deprived him of the dearest Blessing he had, must of itself put him on his Guard, to the very utmost, against mistaking: however prepared he might be by the former mysterious Dispensations of Providence, for future ones. That he loved *Isaac* most tenderly, no one can dispute: that he had a general Tenderness of Heart, his interceding for the vilest of Sinners clearly proves: that his Notions of God's moral Attributes were just and lively, appears from his own Words in his very Intercession; *That the Righteous should be as the Wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right*[k]*?* And that he had any enthusiastic Turn of Mind, or any superstitious Principles, that could induce him to think the offering up his Son prescribed when it was not; or the voluntary Perpetration of so shocking a Deed an Act of Merit, that could procure him a Compensation from Heaven for destroying his whole Comfort and Hopes at once; there is no Shadow either of Proof or Likelihood. We never find him elsewhere attempting to sacrifice human Victims.

[k] Gen. xviii. 25.

There

There had nothing remarkable of any Sort befallen him, that could even ſeem to require one; much leſs ſo exceedingly precious a one: and the *Heathens* themſelves did not offer up their Sons, without being, as they thought, in the moſt urgent Neceſſity and extreme Danger. Indeed we are not certain, that there was in his Time ſuch a Practice in the World: or, if there was, that he knew it. Or if he did; as we find it anciently denied[1], and no where affirmed, that this execrable Cuſtom prevailed in his native Country, probably his Education muſt lead him to abhor it: and certainly the whole Spirit of his Religion was totally different from the bloody, as well as the lewd, Idolatries and Superſtitions of *Canaan*.

Some indeed have ſuſpected the contrary, becauſe it is not ſaid, that he expreſſed any Surprize, or even Reluctance, on receiving the Command. But neither is it ſaid, that he expreſſed any Joy, when a Countermand ſtopped his Hand. Yet muſt he not of Neceſſity, muſt not any Man in like Circumſtances, be his religious Opinions what they will, have felt both? And therefore why may not ſuch Things

1 *Philo* de *Abrahamo*, p. 27.

well be underſtood, without being related? And eſpecially as to the former, what if the ſacred Hiſtorian drew a Veil over Agitations, too ſtrong to be deſcribed: as the Painter of a Heathen Story is ſaid to have done, and is praiſed for doing it, on the ſame Occaſion? Might not *Abraham*, notwithſtanding this, feel the utmoſt Agony of paternal Fondneſs; beg of God to preſerve him from Illuſion and Error: beg, that, *if it were poſſible, this Cup might paſs from him*[m]: yet ſtill, when the Will of God, ſo far as he was capable of judging, appeared to be otherwiſe, acquieſce without Expoſtulation. For *Sodom*, it is true, he did expoſtulate. But how different were the two Caſes? That was a charitable Plea for others: this had been an intereſted one for himſelf. If *Sodom* was deſtroyed, all Hope of Repentance was cut off from a Multitude of Sinners; if *Iſaac* ſuffered, it was not as a Puniſhment; but as a Trial, ſure to end well. And therefore the former Caſe called for Interceſſion: the latter, for Obedience only.

Having no Room then to apprehend, that *Abraham* had any Thing in his Mind to miſlead him; we can have none to doubt, but he examined ſuch an Order as this with the greateſt

[m] Matth. xxvi. 39.

Circum-

Circumſpection, and yielded only to irreſiſtible Evidence of its being Divine. Beſides, it was not given him to be executed that Moment, without Leiſure to recollect himſelf. Three Days intervened before the Time for the Execution of it: and during all theſe his Son was continually in his Sight, going along with him to the Place of Sacrifice: nothing interrupted his Attention to the Horrors of this one dreadful Subject. Full Time was allowed for Imagination to cool, for Nature to work, for Objections of every Sort to be raiſed. Yet *Abraham* perſevered: and therefore his Conviction muſt be founded on Proofs, that could not be ſhaken.

It might indeed appear ſtrange to him, that God ſhould mention no Motive to an Injunction ſo ſevere. But he would perceive immediately, that one Motive was the Trial of his Faith, which was tried more completely by aſſigning no other: and he would perceive afterwards, that no other could be aſſigned, becauſe the Intention of Heaven was that the Deed ſhould not be done.

Beſides this leſſer Difficulty, there were, in Point of Reaſon, two principal ones. The firſt

was, the Unlawfulneſs of the Action: and how that might be removed, I have ſhewn you. The other, to which the Verſe after the Text refers, was, the Prediction, that *in Iſaac his Seed ſhould be called:* that the holy Nation, and the promiſed Meſſiah, ſhould deſcend from him. For, it might be alledged, How could that be verified, if he was to be ſlain now? And yet, with whatever Laws of human Society God might diſpenſe, he would certainly preſerve his own Truth inviolate. But in what Manner *Abraham* anſwered this, the following Verſe informs us. *He accounted,* he reaſoned, for ſo the Word ſignifies, *that God was able to raiſe him up even from the Dead: whence alſo he received him in a Figure.* The Birth of *Iſaac* was like receiving him from the Dead, on account of the Age of both his Parents. Yet when it was foretold, *Abraham,* to uſe the Words of St. *Paul, conſidered not his own Body, now dead, when he was about an hundred Years old, neither yet the Deadneſs of Sarah's Womb,* but was *fully perſuaded, that what God had promiſed, he was able to perform*[a]: and the Event juſtified his Faith. Encouraged by this, he now a ſecond Time *againſt Hope*

[a] Rom. iv. 19, 21.

believed

believed in Hope, that he might become the Father of many Nations[o]. For that Power, which had quickened the barren aged Womb, could alſo quicken the lifeleſs Duſt. It was only carrying on the ſame Kind of wonderful Interpoſition, that he had already ſeen begun. And thus did that very Prediction, which might ſeem to create the moſt inſuperable Difficulty, afford him a Clew to extricate him out of all Difficulty, in Point of Argument, intirely. For if *Iſaac* was to have a Poſterity, he muſt be raiſed again: and that would vindicate the Command of God, and the Patriarch's Obedience, to all Mankind[p].

Some have obſerved a yet farther Circumſtance in the Hiſtory; that God bade him *offer his Son upon one of the Mountains, which he ſhould tell him of*[q]: and hence they conclude, not improbably, that when it is ſaid, *he lift up his Eyes the third Day, and ſaw the Place afar off*[r], he might have known it by ſome remarkable Sign from Heaven, pointing it out to him. And this would be a new and moſt ſeaſonable Confirmation, that he was doing what he ought.

[o] Ver. 18. [p] Neither *Philo* nor *Joſephus* intimate, that *Abraham* reaſoned thus. But the Author of *Nizzachon vetus*, in *Wagenſeil*, p. 22. doth: who therefore probably borrowed this Solution from the New Teſtament, or ſome Chriſtian. [q] Gen. xxii. 2. [r] Gen. xxii. 4.

And ſuppoſing him at length to ſhew it *Iſaac* too, it might well produce in him that intire Submiſſion to ſo ſtrange a Death, which may elſe look hardly credible. For he was unqueſtionably of Age, to have attempted either Reſiſtance or Eſcape, ſince he was of Age to carry the Wood for the Sacrifice: yet he appears abſolutely reſigned; and ſeems to have been bound for no other Reaſon, than becauſe Victims uſually were. But ſtill he might have yielded himſelf up, not in Conſequence of any immediate Notification to him from above: but from mere Dependance on his Father's well known Judgment and Affection. It muſt have been from one of the two Motives: and ſuppoſing it to be only from the latter and the weaker, it doth the higheſt Honour to the Characters of them both*.

But a further and very ſtrong Evidence of *Abraham*'s acting by divine Command, was that which appeared in the Cloſe of this wonderful Tranſaction. If an evil and lying Spirit, if a gloomy Turn of Mind, if an Emulation of any barbarous Heathen Rite, had prompted him to deſign this Act; they would have prompted him alſo to complete the Execution

* Ισαακ μετὰ πεποιθησεως γινωσκων το μελλον ηδεως εγενετο θυσια. *Clem. Rom.* 1 Cor. §. 31.

ecution of it, and never have let him ſtop ſhort juſt where he did. Nay, if theſe bad Motives had influenced him, and in great Mercy God had ſtopt him; he would ſurely at the ſame Time have ſhewn him his Error, inſtead of praiſing and rewarding him. And therefore his Motives were not bad: but a wiſe and gracious Being was the Author of the Command, as well as the Diſpenſation.

But to ſee this yet more fully, let us conſider

III. The Improbability of its producing any hurtful Effects in after Days.

Men may indeed run mad, and think *Abraham's* Example authorizes them to kill their neareſt Relation, or whom they will. And ſo they may run mad, and think the public Good, or any thing elſe, authorizes them. But that any one ever did plead the Precedent of *Abraham* for ſuch an Action, I believe is not pretended. And plainly no one in his Senſes can. *Abraham* was a public and extraordinary Perſon: he was a ſovereign Prince, and accountable to no Power upon Earth: he lived when Divine Revelations were frequent, had long been acquainted with the proper Marks of them, and uſed to ſee them verified: his Inclinations and his Intereſt conſpired in the ſtrongeſt Manner to preſerve him from Miſ-

take:

take: he knew by God's Promiſe, that if he ſacrificed his Child by God's Order, he would ſoon riſe again: and at laſt he was not permitted to do, what merely for a Trial, he was commanded: nor hath any human Creature ever been commanded it ſince. How can this poſſibly be Encouragement to a private and common Man; ſubject, he and his whole Family, to the Laws of the Society, of which he is a Member; born 4000 Years after *Abraham*, in a quite different State of Things; when no Revelations are to be looked for, but all Pretences to them ſuſpected in the higheſt Degree; who hath had no Experience of them, nor can gueſs of what Nature they ſhould be, if there were any: how can he dream of Encouragement from hence, to commit a Deed, contrary to the ſtanding Rules of his own Reaſon, of human Authority, and of the Word of God, merely becauſe he hath a ſtrong Inclination to it, perhaps to ſerve ſome ſelfiſh or wild Purpoſe, that he hath at Heart?

Still ſome have alledged, that however plauſibly we may argue, in Fact human Sacrifices began early in the World: and what could be ſo likely to give Riſe, or at leaſt, Countenance to them, as this Command? But, according to ſome

ſome old Accounts, they began before it. And ſuppoſe they did not; ſtill, if any Perſons had either learned them, or been reconciled to them from hence, it muſt ſurely have been *Abraham*'s Poſterity. And yet we do not find, that ever any one of them, excepting the ſingle doubtful Caſe of *Jephtha* 700 Years after, ſo much as once thought of ſuch an Offering to the God of their Fathers. It was Idols only, that they worſhipped thus; and they did it in Imitation, not of *Abraham*, but of thoſe very *Canaanites*, whom they had been ordered to deſtroy for their Wickedneſs, and expreſſly forbidden to follow in this Act of it. *Take Heed to thyſelf, that thou inquire not, ſaying, how did theſe Nations ſerve their Gods? Even ſo will I do likewiſe. For every Abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done: their Sons and their Daughters have they burnt in the Fire to their Gods*[t]. Nor did the *Canaanites* alone, but Nations, that probably had never heard of *Abraham* or of them, offer ſuch Victims. And therefore the Cuſtom ſeems altogether the Offspring either of diabolical Deluſions, or of prieſtly Tyranny, combined with groſs Ignorance and frantic Terror; ſuggeſting, that the

[t] Deut. xii. 30, 31.

moſt

moſt precious and moſt painful Sacrifices muſt be the moſt efficacious. But had any ever ſupported themſelves in this Practice, by the Hiſtory of *Abraham*, it muſt have been by the groſſeſt Abuſe of that Hiſtory: and every Proceeding, every Mercy of God, is liable to equal Abuſe. A Command of ſuch a Nature, never given but once, and to one Man, and then countermanded before Execution, and clearly explained to be meant, neither for the averting of any Danger, nor the Expiation of any Sin, but merely for an extraordinary Trial of that Man's Dutifulneſs, could not in Reality make the actual Performance of the Thing, ſo commanded, a common Uſage for quite different Purpoſes: any more than *Solomon*'s Order for *dividing the Child in two*[u] could make the Performance of that a common Uſage. Indeed the directly contrary Concluſion was the natural one: that God approved not human Victims; but only ſuch, as he had provided for *Abraham*, inſtead of his Son. And if the Computation of ſome Chronologers be right, that, in a few Years after this Time, ſacrificing Men was aboliſhed in that Part of *Egypt*, which lay neareſt to *Abraham*'s

[u] 1 Kings iii. 25.

Reſidence;

Reſidence; (where perhaps it was never taken up again) we ſhall have Room to think the Tranſaction, that we are now conſidering, might have a moſt happy Conſequence, in that very Reſpect, in which it is groundleſſly accuſed of having a bad one.

But thus I am got inſenſibly into what I propoſed to ſhew

IV. The good Ends, which might be, and were, promoted by it.

Indeed, could we diſcover none, we are juſt as ignorant of the Deſign of ſeveral Things in God's Creation: which appear, though certainly without Reaſon, both uſeleſs and hurtful. But in the preſent Caſe many valuable Purpoſes are viſible and obvious.

This Command was, in the firſt Place, a noble Manifeſtation of *Abraham's* Faith and Obedience. The hardeſt of thoſe Orders which he had received before, was very ſupportable: and they were accompanied with great Promiſes of Advantages; in particular of worldly Advantage. This, on the other Hand, was ſevere beyond Expreſſion; and had no Promiſe or Conſolation at all annexed to it; but, inſtead of that, it enumerated to him the moſt cutting Circumſtances, and placed them before him in the fulleſt Light. *Take now thy Son,*

Son, thine only Son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up *. Yet, pierced to the Heart, as he must be, by these Expressions, he dutifully submitted; without seeking Excuses from any dissuasive Reasonings, without throwing on any one the least Share of the Burthen of his own Anguish; without exposing himself to the tender Solicitations of *Sarah*; without acquainting *Isaac* what was intended, before it became absolutely needful. How astonishingly great, how composed, how considerate a Self-denial was this!

Yet further, the piteous Deed was not to be done immediately, whilst the Impression of the Divine Voice was sounding fresh in his Ears, and excluded every other Sentiment; but at the Distance of three whole Days: during which every Feeling of paternal Affection would return in full Force; and even the inferior Consideration of what his Family and the World would think, and say to so unnatural an Action, if *Isaac* did not rise again instantly, as there was no Proof he would, must singly have a Weight very hard to be supported. Nor were these Days to be spent in Retirement, in Meditation and Prayer, to fortify his Resolution; but altogether in the

* Gen. xxii. 2.

Company

Company of the dear Object, whom he was to slay; whose Conversation would be in a thousand Instances the more moving, as he went along with him unsuspicious of what was to follow; and whose innocent Question at last, *My Father, behold the Fire and the Wood, but where is the Lamb for a burnt Offering*[x], must, one should think, have completed the melting down of all human Resolution. But *Wisdom preserved him*, as the Book of *Wisdom* expresses it[y], *blameless unto God, and kept him strong against his tender Compassion towards his Son:* till now, when the Sacrifice of the Mind was made to the utmost, and only the outward Act was wanting, the *Hand* being *stretched forth*[z] even for that; the Goodness of the Almighty broke forth on a sudden, like the Sun from behind a black Cloud concealing it, *and the Angel of the Lord called unto him out of Heaven, and said, lay not thine Hand upon the Lad: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy Son, thine only Son, from me*[a]. The Transport of hearing these Words must have made in a Moment large Amends for the preceding Pangs. *Isaac* was restored to him without going through *the Bitterness of Death*[b]: Reproach and Misconstruction was avoided: the

[x] Gen. xxii. 7. [y] Wisd. x. 5. [z] Gen. xxii. 10. [a] Ver. 11, 12. [b] 1 Sam. xv. 32.

dreadful Deed dispensed with: the willing Mind accepted: and a solemn Approbation pronounced over him from above, anticipating the final Sentence, *Well done, good and faithful Servant*[c].

Indeed, before this, God had declared, *I know Abraham*[d]. But now he knew him by a new Proof: and, which is the constant Scripture Sense of his trying any one, he manifested him by the Trial, to Angels, to Men, to himself: *and Experience wrought* in him sure *Hope not to be ashamed* upon any future Occasion, *because the Love of God was thus shed abroad in his Heart*[e]. A further Discovery was, and a very delightful one it must be, that, by so decisive an Experiment of *Isaac*'s Piety, his Father knew him to be worthy of his utmost Affection; and worthy of the Choice, which God had made of him, to support Religion, and be the Progenitor of the promised Seed.

Nor did this Trial convey only Improvement, and Comfort, and Reward here and hereafter, to *Abraham:* but useful Instruction to others also. Hence it appeared, that the Servants of the true Deity were as ready to perform his hardest Commands, as those of false ones could be to obey theirs: but that he did not require

[c] Matth. xx. 21. [d] Gen. xviii. 19. [e] Rom. v. 3, 4, 5.

of

of them to *give their First-born for their Transgression, the Fruit of their Body for the Sin of their Soul; but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and walk humbly with their God*[f]. Hence also it appeared, that God was not partial in his Choice of the *Jews* to be his peculiar People: but properly fixed on that Nation, where the most illustrious Instances of religious Obedience had been given; for which this Prerogative, granted them, was a fit Recompence; besides that the Influence of such Examples and Teachers of it, afforded a greater Probability of its lasting there, than any where else.

Hence likewise we may all of us learn, what is yet more material, not to fear making Use of our Reason in Religion, for *Abraham* used his on the Point before us; but still to make a sober and modest Use of it: to believe and do what we plainly see is taught and commanded, though neither the Particulars of the Doctrine, nor the Grounds of the Precept, be at all clear; and not to reject hastily and rashly what we read in Scripture concerning occasional Directions given formerly from above, though it be difficult to account for some of them at present. We may learn further, that the *Victory*

[f] Mic. vi. 7, 8.

which overcometh the World is our Faith[g]; but that we are to ſhew our Faith by our Works[h], as St. *James* obſcrves *Abraham* ſhewed his[i]: not thinking our own Preſſures heavier, and our own Virtue in bearing them greater, than any ones elſe ever were; but joining Humility with Reſignation. And laſtly, we may learn to obey God cheerfully in the moſt unwelcome Injunctions, and truſt him boldly in the moſt inextricable Perplexities: which laſt we find was an ancient Leſſon, founded on this Narration. For, from *Abraham*'s ſaying to *Iſaac*, *God will provide*, (in the *Hebrew* it is *ſee for*) *a Lamb*[k], the Place received its Name, *Jehovah jireh*, and a Proverb its Riſe, *in the Mount of the Lord it ſhall be ſeen*[l]: that is, in the very Extremity, if not before, Proviſion will be made. And indeed, as this Part of the Patriarch's Hiſtory is recorded in the earlieſt Book of the Bible; it is impoſſible to ſay, of how frequent Uſe, or how great upon the whole, it may have been, from his own Time downwards, to good Perſons in all Ages of the Church, *Jewiſh* and *Chriſtian*, under public Afflictions and private. But evidently it may be of unſpeakable Benefit to us, if we ſet but

g 1 John v. 4. h James ii. 18. i Ver. 21.
k Gen. xxii. 8, l Ver. 14.

our

our Hearts to *walk in the Steps of his Faith* [m], in hope of being *blessed with faithful Abraham* [n], who is *the Father of all them, that believe* [o].

Many however may still object, with too much Truth, that his Pattern, though they allow it to be an excellent one, is one that they could never follow, were they ever so plainly commanded. But then, be thankful at least, that you are not commanded: and be assured you never will. Admire and honour, but never think of blaming, him that was able to do so much; and by that Method, amongst others, excite yourselves to do what you are called to. Since, through Divine Grace, he bore so amazing a Trial, the same Grace can surely strengthen you to bear common ones: and you may well submit contentedly, if your dearest Blessing is taken from you, since he was willing to sacrifice his with his own Hand; comforting himself, as you may too, by the full Assurance of a future Resurrection. *For if we believe, that Jesus died and rose again: them also, which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him* [p].

And this leads me to one View more of the Sacrifice of *Isaac*: the Resemblance it hath to

[m] Rom. iv. 12. [n] Gal. iii. 6. [o] Rom. iv. 11.
[p] 1 Thess. iv. 14.

that of Chrift. No wonder it was fo extraordinary a Tranfaction in itfelf, if it was intended to prefigure the moft extraordinary and myfterious one, that the World ever faw: as the agreeing Circumftances prove it muft. In both Cafes you fee a good and kind Father caufing his beloved, only, and innocent Son to fuffer Death. *Ifaac* was Heir to the Promifes of the temporal *Canaan*: through Chrift we claim the Inheritance of the heavenly. *Ifaac* carried the Wood, on which he was bound, in order to be offered up[q]; Chrift carried the Crofs[r], on which he was afterwards nailed, and put to Death. The Place where God appointed the former fhould die, and where the latter died actually, was the very fame; *the Land of Moriah*[s], that is, of God manifefted; on

[q] Gen. xxii. 6. [r] John xix. 17. [s] Gen. xxii. 2. 2 *Chr.* iii. 1. faith, the Temple was built on Mount *Moriah*, where the Lord appeared to *David*. *Joseph. Ant.* l. i. c. 13. §. 1, 2. faith, that Μωριον ορος where the Temple was afterwards built was the Place where *Abraham* was directed to offer *Ifaac*. The Book of *Cozri*, p. 85. faith the fame thing. *Jerom. Qu. Heb.* in *Gen* xxii. 2. faith of the *Hebrews* in general, that they affirm it. Yet *Tillotfon*, in the End of his Sermon on this Text, mentions him, as faying from an ancient and conftant Tradition of the *Jews*, that *Moriah* was *Calvary*. But he fpecifies not the Place. *Reland Pal.* p. 853. faith, "Mons Moria 2 *Chr.* iii. 1. "diftingui omnino debet à Regione Moria, in qua Deus Mon- "tem aliquem (erant enim plures in illa Regione) fe Monftraturum Abrahamo dicit, ubi filium fuum offerat." But I think he doth not mention the Land of *Moriah* elfewhere. Nor doth he explain here, whether he meant any more, than that the Mountain

on one of the Mountains of which, the Temple ſtood; on another, our Saviour's Croſs. The Term of three Days too is remarkably ſpecified in each Hiſtory[t]. *The Lamb*, which *Abraham* ſaid, *God would provide*[u], naturally turns our Thoughts to him, whom the Baptiſt calls the *Lamb of God*[w]; and the Ram ſubſtituted for *Iſaac*[x], to the Temple-Sacrifices of Animals, Types of the Atonement of Chriſt. Then laſtly, the Mountain, where Proviſion was made for *Abraham*'s Diſtreſs, deſerved its Name infinitely better, on account of God's providing there for the Redemption of Mankind.

Theſe Things the Patriarch indeed could not underſtand, unleſs they were revealed to him: for the Likeneſs of two Objects cannot be diſcerned, till both appear. Perhaps he was told the Intent, and thus *ſaw the Day* of

Mountain was to be diſtinguiſhed from the Land, as a Part from the whole. He ſaith, p. 854. that *Moriah* was a Part of *Sion*, and p. 860. that *Euſeb.* and *Jerom* in *Onomaſtico* place *Golgotha* to the North of *Sion*. And they do: but ſay nothing there of *Moriah*. *Vitr Obſ. Sacr.* l. 2. c. 10. §. 8. p. 397, 398. thinks the whole Tract of Country, in which *Zion*, *Calvary*, &c. were, was called the Land of *Moriah*.

t The following Words are quoted from the ancient *Jewiſh* Book, *Bereſchith Rabba: there are many Spaces of three Days in Scripture, one of which is the Reſurrection of the Meſſiah.* It is not in the preſent Copies: but probably was in the ancient. See *Schoettg. de Meſſia*, l. 6. c. 5. §. 5.

u Gen. xxii. 8.

w John i. 29, 34.

x Gen. xxii. 13.

Chriſt *and was glad*[y]. How gracious an Ending of ſo terrifying a Diſpenſation! But however that were, we now may juſtly conclude, that what he then required *Abraham* to do for him, he had purpoſed from Eternity, in the Counſel of unſearchable Wiſdom, to do for his loſt Creatures. And, let the comforting Reflection dwell with you, *He that ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all Things*[z]?

y John viii. 56. z Rom. viii. 32.

SER-

SERMON XVIII.

DEUT. XXIX. 29.

The ſecret Things belong unto the Lord our God: but thoſe Things, which are revealed, belong unto us and to our Children for ever; that we may do all the Words of this Law.

IT is one material Conſideration, amongſt many, in Favour of the *Jewiſh* and *Chriſtian* Scriptures, that they preſerve throughout ſo due a Medium in the Diſcoveries, which they make, of Divine Truths, as to direct the Faith and Practice of Men without indulging their Curioſity. The Writings of Enthuſiaſts would of Courſe have been overrun with Myſteries: and much fuller of Explanations, that would make them ſtill more obſcure, than of the plain Doctrines of Piety and Morals. Impoſtors would never have neglected to recommend themſelves by doing us ſo ſingular a Pleaſure, as that of letting us into all the Ar-

cana of Heaven. Both would have entertained us, as they very safely might, with long and astonishing Accounts of the Essence of God, the Orders and Employments of invisible Beings, of the Counsels of Providence in the Government both of them and us, of the Particulars in which the future Happiness and Misery of Man will consist. Now on the contrary, of these Matters holy Writ gives no other than brief, imperfect, general Notices: and those merely in Subservience to the far less agreeable Subjects, of our Duties to God, each other, and ourselves.

Thus it delivers Predictions of future Events: not for the vain Amusement of the Inquisitive; but partly for Direction, Warning, or Encouragement to particular Nations and Ages: partly to establish the Truth of Revelation, in all Nations and Ages, by their Accomplishment. It contains also supernatural Doctrines: but such only, as make the Groundwork, more or less, of our Obligations, or our Hopes. These it was evidently requisite for us to know: and accordingly they are notified to us: but without any Art used to render the strangest of them plausible, or any Care taken to gratify us with full Information about them,

or

or to ſhew us why it is withheld. The Articles of Belief are laid down with the utmoſt Simplicity: our Aſſent to them is required on the Teſtimony of God: and when once we have been told enough to regulate our Practice, we are only told farther, that *Faith without Works is dead*[a]. A grievous Diſappointment to our Wiſhes undoubtedly: but ſtill our Reaſon muſt allow, that this is the proper Conduct of the Lord of all to his Creatures: and we find it to be his perpetual Conduct from the Beginning of the Bible to the End. What our correſponding Duty is, we are taught in ſeveral Places; but no where ſo diſtinctly and fully, as in the Text: which conveys as neceſſary Inſtruction, to this Day, as it did originally, though relating in Part to different Points. And happy would Men always have been made, and happy might they become yet, by the Obſervance of its Rules. Theſe are

I. That we ſhould never pry into Matters, which infinite Wiſdom hath concealed. For *the ſecret Things belong unto the Lord our God.*

II. That we ſhould receive with attentive Humility whatever it communicates. For *thoſe Things, which are revealed, belong to us and to our Children for ever.*

[a] James ii. 20.

III. That we ſhould allow every divine Truth its due Influence on our Behaviour. For we are to learn them, *that we may do all the Words of this Law.*

Theſe are the Maxims, which ought to be eſtabliſhed in our Minds, before we examine into any particular Doctrine: and the previous Thought, how particular Doctrines will be affected by them, ought to be avoided, as far as is poſſible. They ſhould be explained without Partiality, embraced without Jealouſy, and their genuine Conſequences admitted, whatever they may prove to be.

I. That we ſhould never pry into Matters, which infinite Wiſdom hath concealed. For we ſhall ſeldom, if at all, be wiſer for ſuch Inquiries: we ſhall never be happier or better: and we ſhall uſually be more wretched, and leſs innocent.

In what Reaſon or Experience diſcovers to us, farther Speculations or Trials may produce new Diſcoveries. But of Articles depending on mere Revelation, as we could have diſcerned nothing without it, we ſhall be able to diſcern very little, if any Thing, beyond it. In the ſhorteſt and ſeemingly moſt obvious Conſequences, drawn concerning Subjects, that lie naturally

naturally out of our Reach, we muſt be exceedingly liable to Miſtakes: and venturing far into the Dark, is the ſure Way to ſtumble. Another State may probably withdraw the Veil, and acquaint us clearly and familiarly with what now perplexes our Reaſonings, and wearies our Conjectures. Let us wait then contentedly for the Time, which of Neceſſity we muſt wait for: and apply to ourſelves the Comfort, which our Saviour gave St. *Peter* on a different Occaſion, *What I do thou knoweſt not now: but thou ſhalt know hereafter* [b]. Yet even then, Truths will remain, the full Comprehenſion of which muſt for ever be impoſſible, not only to us, but to the higheſt Creatures of that almighty Being, one of whoſe Diſtinctions, inculcated in Scripture, is, *God only wiſe* [c]. His Nature and Attributes being unlimited, his Works and Providence reaching through Immenſity and Eternity, the greateſt Advances of finite Beings, muſt be infinitely diſtant from a complete underſtanding of them. *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto Perfection? It is high as Heaven: what canſt thou do? deeper than Hell: what canſt thou know? The Meaſure*

[b] John xiii. 7. [c] Rom. xvi. 27. 1 Tim. i. 17. Jude 25.

thereof

thereof is longer than the Earth, and broader than the Sea[d].

But could Inquiry add more to our Knowledge, than it can: would it increase our Happiness? We meet with Difficulties, and should be glad of Solutions: we enter a little Way into a Subject; see that vastly more lies behind, and earnestly long to be Masters of it. But if we were so, are we at all sure, whether fresh Doubts and Questions, more embarrassing perhaps than the present, might not immediately arise from thence? We find it so in the visible World, where we had less Ground to expect it. New Facts are daily observed, new Properties of Bodies discovered, new Deductions made from them: and what is the Consequence? Why, that the Scheme of Things appears deeper and less fathomable, for every Step we take in Hopes of getting to the Bottom of it. In all Likelihood therefore the same is the Case of the spiritual World too: and, by knowing more of it, we should be farther from being satisfied than ever, if our Satisfaction depends on knowing all. The System of Religion is fully taught us by common Reason, and the plain Parts of Scripture.

[d] Job xi. 7, 8, 9.

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The Defence of it is conducted moſt prudently by owning our Ignorance where we are ignorant, which gives no Advantages; whereas Affectation of the contrary gives many. The Practice of it conſiſts, not in filling our Heads with unneceſſary Speculations, but applying our Hearts to neceſſary Duties. The Rewards of it are annexed to believing and doing what is required of us: and how can we be the better then for aiming at more?

Indeed we ſhall ſcarcely avoid being much the worſe. By engaging in Matters, of which we are unqualified to judge, we ſhall be in Danger of judging materially wrong; either miſtaking the Nature, or even denying the Truth of Religion, like thoſe of old, who, *profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, became Fools*[e]. And the Errors, into which we may thus fall, will be the leſs excuſable, as they will proceed from our own Raſhneſs. Beſides, the more intent Perſons are on purſuing their Theories, the leſs Time, and uſually the leſs Concern, they will have for performing their Obligations: excepting, it may be, ſome fanciful ones, which they have built on their imagined Diſcoveries: reſembling thoſe *Worſhippers of An-*

[e] Rom. i. 22.

gels,

gels, whom St. *Paul* charges with *intruding into Things, which they had not ſeen, being vainly puffed up by their fleſhly Minds*[f]. Superfluous Inquiſitiveneſs is indeed ſometimes accompanied with exceſſive Diffidence: and then, though leſs criminal, it produces moſt tormenting Anxieties. But commonly it proceeds from a Degree of that irreverent Vanity, which poſſeſſed our Parent *Eve*, and coſt Mankind ſo dear, of invading ſuch Knowledge, as God hath reſerved to himſelf, inſtead of acquieſcing cheerfully in ſo much as he hath imparted.

Then with this undutiful Spirit eaſily aſſociates itſelf a ſtill more miſchievous one, of Uncharitableneſs and ſpiritual Tyranny. For when once Men are aſſuming enough to determine, out of their own Inventions, Things, which their Maker hath not determined, the next natural Step is, to *contend* for them far more *earneſtly*, than for *the Faith once delivered to the Saints*[g]: caſting off Chriſtian Love, refuſing Communion or Toleration, and too often renouncing common Humanity, to all who differ from them. And therefore the Apoſtle gives *Timothy*, at the ſame Time, theſe two Directions: *Follow Righteouſneſs, Charity, Peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure*

[f] Col. ii. 18. [g] Jude 3.

Heart.

Heart. But foolish and unlearned Questions (and nothing is more *unlearned*, than disputing in the Dark) *avoid; knowing that they do gender Strifes*[h].

On all Accounts then we should keep close to plain Reason and plain Scripture: let our Assent be determinate, as far as they are undeniably so; but make no Decision concerning what is doubtful, invent no groundless Hypothesis to clear up what is obscure, nor carry on too long Chains of Argument from what seems the most evident. I conclude this Head with that excellent Advice of the Son of *Sirach*. *Seek not out the Things that are too hard for thee, neither search the Things that are above thy Strength. But what is commanded thee, think thereupon with Reverence: for it is not needful for thee to see with thine Eyes the Things that are in secret*[i]. *Be not curious in unnecessary Matters: for more Things are shewed unto thee, than Men understand. Many are deceived by their own vain Opinion: and an evil Suspicion hath overthrown their Judgment. Without Eyes thou shalt want Light: profess not therefore the Knowledge that thou hast not*[k].

II. The next Rule, which *Moses* gives, is, that we should receive, with attentive Humi-

[h] 2 Tim. ii. 22, 23. [i] The *Greek* hath it, more briefly and expressively, thus: *For of the hidden Things thou hast no need.* [k] Ecclus iii. 21—25.

lity,

lity, whatever infinite Wisdom communicates to us. *For those Things, which are revealed, belong to us and to our Children for ever.*

Indeed let any Proposition be delivered to us, as coming from God or from Man, we can believe it no farther than we understand it: and therefore if we do not understand it at all, we cannot believe it all; I mean, explicitly: but only be persuaded, that it contains some Truth or other, though we know not what. Again, were any Doctrine laid down, which we clearly saw to be self-contradictory, or otherwise absurd, that could never be an Object of our Faith. For there is no Possibility of admitting, upon any Authority, a Thing for true, which we evidently perceive to be false. Nor would calling such Doctrines mysterious mend the Matter in the least. For indeed there is no Mystery in them: they are as plain, as any in Nature; as plainly contrary to Truth, as any Thing else is agreeable to it.

But if our Assent be required to a Proposition, which hath some Meaning and no Inconsistency in it, and is undeniably asserted in a Revelation well proved: but only we have no other Evidence for it; nor should of ourselves ever have imagined any such Thing, indeed should have thought

thought it very unlikely; and ſtill cannot throughly comprehend it; or diſcover, or ſo much as gueſs at, the Reaſons, the Manner, the Circumſtances, of what we are taught: all this is abſolutely no Foundation for diſbelieving it. Nay, though we ſhould ſee Difficulties and Objections againſt it, which we could not particularly anſwer, we ſhould allow them only their proper Weight: which may be far overbalanced by the general Atteſtations given of its Divine Authority.

For that God is able to communicate many important Truths to us, which we have no Means of knowing otherwiſe, concerning his own Nature, his Deſigns, and Diſpenſations, concerning the Inhabitants of the inviſible World, and our future State in it, can no more be doubted, than whether we ourſelves, according to our various Knowledge of Men and Things, are able to give unexpected and ſerviceable Notices, one to another. And that we ſhould underſtand nothing farther of his Secrets than is unfolded to us, nor be capable of anſwering many Queſtions, that may be aſked about them, otherwiſe than by confeſſing our Ignorance, is ſo far from being a Plea againſt their being really his, that it is a neceſſary Conſequence of it: ſo far from being

ſtrange in ſupernatural Things, that it is common in natural ones. In ſeveral Articles of revealed Religion, we believe Things of which we know not the Manner or the Reaſons. But is it there alone, that we do ſo? In the whole of God's Creation, what do we meet with, that is not, more or leſs, of the ſame Sort? We know not the Eſſence of our own Mind, nor the preciſe Diſtinctions of its ſeveral Faculties: and why then ſhould we hope to comprehend, or deny becauſe we cannot comprehend, the perſonal Characters, which, we are told, exiſt in the Subſtance of the Godhead? We know not, how *the Soul and Fleſh is one Man:* what wonder if we know not, how *God and Man is one Chriſt*[1]? We are ignorant how the Viciſſitudes of Day and Night, Summer and Winter, are produced: how the Fruits of the Earth nouriſh us: how Bodies cohere, or impel each other: how our ſeveral Senſations are performed: how we move a Hand or an Eye, though it is our own doing. Familiar as theſe Things are; the Manner of them, when examined to the Bottom, hath Obſcurities, which the moſt learned will never penetrate. *I beheld*, ſaith the Preacher, *all the Work of God,—that is done*

[1] *Ath.* Creed.

under

under the Sun. Though a Man labour to ſeek it out, yet ſhall he not find it: yea farther, though a wiſe Man think to know it, yet ſhall he not be able[m]. Surely then we may content ourſelves to act in Matters of Faith, as in thoſe of Senſe: and believe what we do underſtand, the Thing itſelf in general; though many Circumſtances remain, which we underſtand not, and therefore are not required to believe any Thing in relation to them[n]:

Again: in the Frame of Nature and the Scheme of Providence we diſcern indeed evident Proofs of Wiſdom and Goodneſs: but with innumerable Particulars intermixed; which we perceive not to be all uſeful, or the Creation any Way the better for them. Yet we never think of excepting theſe from amongſt the Works of God: never doubt of their having a real, though unknown, Subſerviency to valuable Ends. Why, juſt ſo in the Goſpel-Revelation: look upon the general Plan, and it is undeniably adapted to promote the Divine Honour, and human Virtue and Happineſs: but how ſome Points are condu-

m Eccl. viii. 17. n Ubi igitur aut qualis eſt iſta Mens? [divina] Ubi tua, aut qualis? poteſne dicere? An ſi omnia ad intelligendum non habeo, quæ habere vellem; ne iis quidem, quæ habeo, mihi per te uti licebit? *Ciſc. Tuſ. Diſp.* l. 28.

cive to them, we ſee leſs clearly, or perhaps not at all. Yet ſtill, as they are Parts of a Syſtem confeſſedly good, and clearly proved; and we cannot expect to comprehend all the ſecret Connexions and References in God's moral Government of us, which extends to Eternity, and may extend to Worlds far out of our Sight; it is unreaſonable beyond Expreſſion, to refuſe believing any Thing, till we know the Ground of every Thing: and to deny that implicit Faith to our Maker in ſome few Inſtances, which we are obliged in ſo many to have in one another. Scornful Rejection of Doctrines, that have all the outward Marks of his Authority, merely becauſe we cannot inveſtigate the inward Reaſons or complete Scheme of them, would be ſhocking Irreverence in the higheſt of his Creatures: and much worſe doth it become our low Rank of Being, and the lamentable Weakneſs of our degenerate Faculties. *Hardly do we gueſs aright at Things, that are upon Earth; and with Labour do we find the Things, that are before us: but the Things that are in Heaven, who hath ſearched out? And thy Counſel who hath known, except thou give Wiſdom, and ſend thy Holy Spirit from above*[a]?

[a] Wiſd. ix. 16.

Further

Further yet: ſhould a Revelation contain Aſſertions, that appear in themſelves unlikely; and liable to Objections, that we are at a Loſs how to ſolve: even this, though perhaps it might juſtly in certain Caſes, weaken our Aſſent, yet would by no Means be ſufficient to prevent or deſtroy it. Some Difficulties may perplex us, merely for want of the Knowledge, that other Men have. Some Subjects, as f[illegible]s we can judge, have Difficulties on eve[illegible]ble Suppoſition: which therefore, ly[illegible]ly againſt all, cannot be urged [illegible] any one in particular: for ſomething [illegible]t be true. Many Points, which our own [illegible]ſon proves to us, for Example, concerning the Attributes of God, natural and moral, are embarraſſed with Perplexities belonging to them, as hard to be unravelled, as any Thing that Scripture teaches, on theſe or any other Heads. Indeed whenever a finite Mind hath an infinite Object before it; or one, which, though limited, is too large for its Graſp, the moſt accurate Arguments upon it, will thwart one another. Throughout the material World are Facts, of which, on proper Teſtimony, we are very juſtly perſuaded, though we cannot anſwer half the Objections, that a ſubtle Reaſoner may bring againſt them. Con-

 cerning

cerning the free Actions of our own Minds, Doubts have been raised, which, I believe, no Man pretends he can remove. In the wisest Conduct of any worldly Affair, Steps may be taken, for which they can never account, who are acquainted with it only in Part. And surely much less ought we to think of having the Nature and the Ways of God brought down to our poor Apprehensions. Not that every seeming Difficulty in Religion, or in Revelation, is a real one. Some Persons have made Things darker, than they are: others have wanted to make them clearer, than they can be: and between them, unmeaning Words, and unwarrantable Notions, have been added to those of Scripture: which hath thus been charged with what it never meant to say. But we own, after these Mistakes are rectified, there will be Room for plausible Suggestions against some of its Doctrines. And they should neither be dissembled on one Hand, nor exaggerated on the other: such Weight as they have, when those Abatements from it have been made, which the Considerations now mentioned to you require, should be fairly allowed them. But then the various Evidences of the Gospel should be allowed their Weight also: and whoever doth

that honeſtly, will never reject it, or any Article of it.

Some indeed, who are far from rejecting it on the whole, fancy however, that they do it Service by interpreting the myſterious Parts of it in ſuch a Manner, as will reduce them to the Level of our Conceptions: and ſo are free in wreſting Holy Writ from its obvious Meaning, to fix upon it what they deem a more rational one. Now certainly a ſingle Expreſſion, or even a number of ſcattered Expreſſions, muſt not always be taken in the moſt rigid Senſe. The Nature of the Thing, the Genius of the Language, the Cuſtom of the Writer, his Context, the general Scope of his Doctrine, and of theirs with whom his may be fitly compared, in ſhort, all juſt Rules of judging ought to be called in, to ſettle the Import of any difficult Paſſage: and nothing more built on a few Words, than can be well ſupported; eſpecially no Article, that is at once of great Conſequence and improbable. But ſtill there is an oppoſite Extreme, too frequent, and very dangerous, of explaining Things away. The ſacred Authors are not to have a forced Conſtruction put upon them, to make them ſuit our Notions the better: but we muſt examine impartially what

they really deliver; and take it as it is, with the Difficulties belonging to it. For though the Attempt of altering the Scheme of Revelation, in order to defend it, may be a well-meant Officiousness, it is an irreverent, an unjustifiable, and will be an unsuccessful one. Giving up as indefensible, what is truly scriptural, is so far casting off Scripture: and Unbelievers will refute our Interpretations, and take Advantage of our Concessions: whereas, keeping close to the Plan of God's Word, we need not fear maintaining our Ground. The disputed Articles were doubtless made Parts of it for wise Motives: for many, in all Likelihood, which we see not; and for some, which we do see. Our Life on Earth is a State of Trial. Many Things try, how we conduct our Affections; why may not some be placed in our Way for the moral Exercise of our Understandings? Thus we shall have an Opportunity of shewing, whether, on the one Hand, we will idly neglect employing our Reason at all, or, on the other, presumptuously exalt it against our Maker; or whether, avoiding both Errors, we will carefully use our own Faculties, and duly respect his Omniscience. By adhering to this Medium, the first Christians preserved the Doctrine of the Gospel in

ſuch Purity, that *Irenæus* writes concerning them thus. *Neither will the moſt able Man, who preſides in the Church, ſay other than this; (for no one is above his Maſter): nor the weakeſt diminiſh any Thing from what hath been delivered. For the Faith being one and the ſame; neither he, that can ſay much about it, adds to it; nor he, that can ſay little, takes away*[p].

III. The laſt Rule, implied in the Text, is, that we ſhould allow every divine Truth its due Influence on our Behaviour. For we are to learn them, *that we may do all the Words of this Law.*

Indeed merely *receiving the Truth in the Love of it*[q] is a moral Act: and in ſome Caſes may be one of great Virtue. Whence our Saviour ſaith to St. *Thomas*; *Bleſſed are they, that have not ſeen, and yet have believed*[r]: bleſſed in Proportion to the Integrity of their Judgement, not the Poſitiveneſs of their Perſuaſion. But ſcarce will it be found, that any Article of Faith is propoſed for the Probation of this only. Each hath its practical Conſequences, either flowing of Neceſſity from it, or built with Propriety upon it. In proportion as we *know God*, we are to *glorify him as God*[s]: according to every

[p] Iren. l. 1. c. 3. al. 10. [q] 2 Theſſ. ii. 10. [r] John xx. 29. [s] Rom. i. 21.

Particular,

Particular, which the Scripture hath manifested concerning him. And the ſeveral Obligations, incumbent on us, towards him, ought not to be eſtimated, however commonly they are, by their Influence on the Affairs of our preſent Life, but by the Streſs, which he, who alone knows the proper one, hath laid upon them. Our Performance of theſe Obligations, as it was the true Motive to the Delivery of each Article, is the juſt Meaſure of our Belief in it. If we know enough of the myſterious Doctrines in Religion, to fulfil thoſe Duties, of which they are each reſpectively the Foundation, our Knowledge, however imperfect, is ſufficient. And if thoſe Duties remain unfulfilled, the completeſt Knowledge will not avail us. Nor indeed will the completeſt Practice of ſuch Duties alone: for we muſt *do all the Words of* God's *Law*[t]: and the plainer any Part of it is, the leſs excuſable the Neglect of it will be. Our firſt and moſt evident, and therefore ſtrongeſt Obligations are to the Dictates of our inward Nature. Other Things are neceſſary for ſuch as have the Means of being acquainted with them. But theſe lie within the Reach of all Men; and all ſhould obſerve them preferably

[t] Deut. xxvii. 26.

to

to whatever can be Matter of Dispute. Living agreeably to clear Rules is the Method for obtaining Light into those, which are obscure. For *if any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God*[u]: whereas it is no Wonder, that they, who *put away a good Conscience, concerning Faith make Shipwreck.*[w] Or however orthodox any Man's Belief may be, if his Life be bad, as he fails in one essential Part of answering the Design of the Gospel, he must fail of the Rewards, and incur the Punishments of it.

But, though every Instance of Christian Behaviour will be indispensably required of those who make Profession of Christianity: yet one deserves particular mention, since the Apostle hath mentioned it particularly in relation to the present Subject. *Though I understand all Mysteries and all Knowledge, and have all Faith,— and have no Charity, I am nothing*[x]. Now this Virtue is a very comprehensive one: but so far as it belongs peculiarly to the Matter before us, it consists in disposing us to gentle Treatment of those who differ from us in Points of Speculation, and of consequent Practice; especially when such Points are either doubtful in themselves, or perplexed by the Arts of Controversy,

[u] John vii. 17. [w] 1 Tim. i. 19. [x] 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

or when Men are unfitted by involuntary Prejudices to judge rightly concerning them. We must indeed think as we apprehend Reason and Scripture to direct us, both of the Importance of Things, and the Conduct of Men. On proper Occasions too our Opinion must be declared. We are by no Means to acknowledge, either in our Words or Actions, those for sound Believers, whom we conceive not to be such: nor to shew Indifference about Doctrines, which appear to us of Moment to the Salvation of Mankind. Errors may proceed from as blamable a Temper, and produce as mischievous Effects, as the grossest Immoralities. And we may deem and pronounce a Man's Condition to be dangerous on Account of his Errors: yet have the truest Good-will and Compassion for him; nay, and the highest Regard in other Respects.

But if we are hasty in suspecting, or unfair or only rigorous in interpreting, vehement or artful in censuring, or inwardly pleased with thinking harshly: then begins that inhuman Sin of Uncharitableness; against which we ought to guard ourselves, by recollecting every Circumstance, that can make in Favour of our Brethren. Sometimes Men appear to differ, when they do not: or to differ much more

widely, than they do: their Expreſſions vary ſtrangely, and perhaps are quite oppoſite; when, had they but Coolneſs and Clearneſs enough to underſtand one another, they mean, at leaſt very nearly, the ſame Thing. And this Conſideration ſhould induce us to interpret with Candor the Words of thoſe, who may appear to depart from the eſtabliſhed Doctrines: but then ſurely they in Return ought to interpret with at leaſt equal Candor the Forms, in which the eſtabliſhed Doctrines are, and long have been, profeſſed in the Church of Chriſt. But farther: though a Perſon may be in a palpable Error, poſſibly it may be ſuch, as no exceedingly bad Conſequences will attend: or though the Article be important, it may not be eſſential. Or, however fundamentally he may err in one Point, he may agree with us in all or moſt others; nay, be as zealous for them, as we are: and ſome kind Notice ought to be taken of that.

Beſides, let his Errors reach to ever ſo many and material Points; yet, to make him perſonally criminal in any conſiderable Degree, he muſt not only have had ſuch Means of Information, as are, ſtrictly ſpeaking, ſufficient; but his Rejection of thoſe Means, or Failure of being influenced by them, muſt have ariſen from

a worſe Cauſe, than mere human Fallibility; or ſuch Inattention and Prepoſſeſſion, as are incident to the better Sort of Minds. For when theſe alone miſlead him, he hath good Ground ſurely for an humble Hope, that his gracious Maker will not impute to him for Sin, the Faults of which he was ignorantly guilty. Still the Miſtakes, even of ſuch a one, may be greatly detrimental to Society, to Virtue, to Religion: and therefore the public Warning of general Denunciations againſt them, may both be uſeful and requiſite, and ſuch Denunciations are far from deſerving to be condemned as uncharitable. But then they muſt be underſtood, like moſt other general Expreſſions, with due Limitations. And before we can apply them to particular Perſons, there are ſo many unknown Circumſtances to be taken into the Account, and ſo many Allowances to be made, which, without ſeeing into the Heart, cannot be made juſtly, that the rational, as well as Chriſtian, Rule is, not to *judge another Man's Servant*. Our Concern is, to believe and act right ourſelves: as for thoſe around us, *to their own Maſter they ſtand or fall*, and we ſhould be very backward to caſt thoſe out, whom perhaps *God will receive*.

ceive[y]. Or however bad an Opinion we may conceive any peculiar Aggravations oblige us to entertain of their future Condition in the next World; or however neceſſary we may judge it *after a firſt and ſecond Admonition to reject*[z] them from Communion with us; we are bound by the moſt ſacred Ties, neither to do them any private, nor procure them any public, Injury or Hardſhip; but uſe them with all poſſible prudent Mildneſs and Tenderneſs: which is likely to reclaim them if any Thing can; and ſhould it not, they will ſurely remain Objects of Pity, as well as Diſlike.

Theſe are the Rules, which plainly ſuit our preſent State of Imperfection. And may the careful Obſervation of them bring us all ſafely to a better: wherein, *that which is perfect being come, that which is in Part ſhall be done away. For now we ſee through a Glaſs darkly; but then Face to Face: now we know in Part; but then ſhall we know as alſo we are known. And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, theſe three: but the greateſt of theſe is Charity*[a].

[y] Rom. xiv. 3, 4. [z] Tit. iii. 10. [a] 1 Cor. xiii. 10, 12, 13.

FINIS.